

THE POPULAR AMERICAN BALLAD FROM 1920 – 1950

by

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Submitted to the faculty of the
Jacobs School of Music in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Music
Indiana University
December 2016

Accepted by the faculty of the
Indiana University Jacobs School of Music,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Music

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November 14, 2016

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To my husband, Dan—without you, none of this would have been possible.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my research director, Dr. Ayana Smith and my committee chair, Patricia Stiles. Both of these woman have made an enormous impact on me as a scholar, performer, and human being. When I thought I couldn't complete this journey, you were there to encourage me and keep me motivated – for this, I am eternally grateful. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Brian Horne and Ms. Marietta Simpson, who have given me invaluable advice, support, and encouragement throughout this process. Friends, relatives, and colleagues have provided me with help and encouragement as well, but a special thanks goes to my husband, Dan, and children—Ashley, Kaleb, Allison, Abigail, and Annalise. Thank you for your encouragement and support. I love you guys!

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Chapter 1: The Popular American Ballad

The songs from the “Golden Era” of the Broadway musical are part of popular American culture. The songs from this era were as well-known by the population of America as German Lieder were in most homes in nineteenth-century Germany and deserve to be studied in a formal way. These songs are beautiful and memorable and share many traits with art songs. According to Michael Feinstein, “It was a time when songs and songwriting were an essential part of the fabric of our culture and helped shape the attitudes, morals, and beliefs through their inherent power and ability to reach the hearts of the nation...”¹

There are many reasons the music of the twenties, thirties, and forties became such a lasting part of the fabric of American society. One reason was advances in technology. The invention of sound recordings made these songs accessible in every home. Radio, too, helped ensure these songs were readily available to the public. No longer did people have to attend live musical performances to experience music. Recordings allowed people to recreate the emotional connection to their favorite songs. When the Great Depression hit in 1929, music was one thing that helped to sustain hope in America. Many people lost everything – their job, home, and dignity – but their love of music could not be taken from them. These songs also represent an important part of American History. In their book, *America’s Songs: The Stories Behind the Songs of Broadway, Hollywood, and Tin Pan Alley*, Furia and Lasser wrote, “Our songwriters have

¹ Michael Feinstein, *The Gershwins and Me: A Personal History in Twelve Songs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 8.

given us an emotional history of our times by encapsulating our attitudes, values, and behavior for over a hundred years.²

Many books have been written about songs from the Golden Era, but only a few have real academic value. These books are primarily looks at the artists who have sung the songs or the stories behind the songs, and as such, they are interesting and entertaining, but are not useful in academia. Other books focus on the composers' lives. Allen Forte's book, *The American Popular Ballad of the Golden Era: 1924-1950*, is one of the first books to focus on this body of literature in a structured way. Forte breaks down each of the ballads he chooses by examining a limited number of variables.³ Forte devotes a chapter each to harmonic language, rhythmic features, melodic design, lyric, and form for the ballads from this area. Forte also wrote a book entitled, *Listening to Classic American Popular Songs*. In this 2001 book (with accompanying CD) Forte discusses these songs from the perspective of an informed listener. The first several sections of this text discuss the theoretical aspects of music one should have some knowledge of to be considered an informed listener. These sections include information on melody, harmony, rhythm, form, and lyrics.⁴

Academic articles pertaining to songs from the Golden Era are more plentiful. Journals such as *The Journal of the American Musicological Society* (JAMS) and *Journal of Music Theory* both have published numerous articles by authors exploring various aspects of popular song from 1920-1950. In his article, "The High Analysis of Low

² Philip Furia and Michael Lasser, From the Introduction to *America's Songs: The Stories Behind Broadway, Hollywood, and Tin Pan Alley* (New York: Routledge, 2006), xxvi.

³ Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad of the Golden Era, 1924-1950: A Study in Musical Design* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4.

⁴ Allen Forte, *Listening to Classic American Popular Songs* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 1.

Music,” Dai Griffiths explores the differences in subject matter between “art” music and popular music. He also discusses why we need to explore popular music.⁵

A description of what constitutes an “American sound” is something that has been of great debate. The four composers whose music I have chosen to examine all have that unmistakable American sound. While there may be hints of their birth origins, it is clear that the most enduring melodies they gave us are truly American. When discussing the music of Jerome Kern, Alex Wilder gives a thoughtful, yet concise, definition of American character in music. He wrote, “For a song to possess an American character it requires a subtler distinction than the presence of marked syncopation. Sometimes it is the lyric, which causes the listener to take for granted its native source. Sometimes it is the shape of the song, its unacademic looseness, and sometimes simply that it doesn't sound like an importation.”⁶

Jeffrey Magee discusses the musical ethnicity of Irving Berlin’s music in his article, “Irving Berlin’s ‘Blue Skies’: Ethnic Affiliations and Musical Transformations.”⁷ Many of the composers from Tin Pan Alley were Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. These composers came to America—many as young children—and learned to assimilate themselves into American culture. These composers would go on to write music that was to become synonymous with an American sound.⁸

⁵ Dai Griffiths, “The High Analysis of Low Music,” *Music Analysis*, Vol. 18, no. 3 (October 1999): 389-435, accessed May 21, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/854453?origin=JSTOR-pdf>.

⁶ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1684-1686, Kindle.

⁷ Jeffrey Magee, “Irving Berlin’s ‘Blue Skies’: Ethnic Affiliations and Musical Transformations,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 84, no. 4, (Winter 2000): 537-580, assessed June 7, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/742595>.

⁸ Ibid., 3.

Although there are numerous wonderful ballads from the 1920s to the 1950s, it is impossible to discuss them all. For example, there are several songs by Gershwin that are extremely popular, but have very similar traits, so the decision was made to only examine one song of the many that were of a similar type. Another limiting factor was availability of source material. Since the focus of this paper is a singer and teacher's guide to the ballad, I wanted to be sure the songs discussed were widely available. There were numerous excellent examples left out of this document because they were only available as single copies. All of the songs discussed can be found in eight different anthologies. Hal Leonard published a series of *The Great American Songbook* anthologies, most of the songs discussed come from these four volumes. The rest of the songs come from composer anthologies (two for Gershwin and one for Porter), and another stand-alone Great American Songbook anthology, also published by Hal Leonard. The complete listing, including ISBNs, can be found in the appendix.

This research project will focus on a limited number of some of the most popular ballads from this time period. Most of the songs as published in these anthologies are in the original keys. It is quite common for a singer to change the key of a particular song to suit his or her vocal needs. Almost any of the popular songs discussed in the paper are widely available in a variety of keys from www.musicnotes.com or www.sheetmusicplus.com. Many of these songs are suitable for use in the applied voice studio for pedagogical and interpretive purposes.

One of the first things this paper must address is, "what is a ballad?" According to dictionary.com a ballad is defined as, "any light, simple song, especially one of

sentimental or romantic character, having two or more stanzas all sung to the same melody.”⁹ This definition is very broad and open to many interpretations.

The definition from Oxford Music Online gives a few additional parameters, but is still broad. “A short popular song that often features a narrative element. The work often signifies a slow-tempo love song, and ballads became especially important to jazz repertory and Tin Pan Alley song.”¹⁰

As you see from these definitions, the term “ballad” is open to many potential interpretations. When first investigating this topic, I struggled with what songs I might include as part of the “Great American Standard Ballad.” The mood and character for a number of these songs change a great deal when you vary the tempo or rhythmic style. For example, was it appropriate to include something that is typically performed in a more “up-tempo” like “Night and Day?” Ultimately, I found there were numerous tunes, which could be performed at a variety of tempi and decided to include them here.

⁹ “Ballad,” Dictionary.com *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. (Random House, Inc.), accessed July 20, 2014, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/ballad>.

¹⁰ Charles Garrett. “Ballad.” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford University Press), accessed July 20, 2014, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2227666>.

Chapter 2: Composers and Lyricists

Composers

Although there are several composers who composed ballads that have stood the test of time, the scope of this paper does not allow for the examination of all of them. The focus of this paper is the ballads of Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin. These composers were chosen because they all made significant contributions to not only the repertoire, but also in innovations to the genre.

Jerome Kern

The fact that the theatregoing[sic] public likes my music is no credit to me. There are many other composers who write better music that the public doesn't like.

Jerome Kern¹¹

The eighth child of Henry and Fanny Kern, Jerome David Kern, was born on January 27, 1885. The first five of the Kern children (all boys) did not survive infancy, but the youngest, Jerry—as he was called—and two brothers, did. He was born after his parents spent a long day at Jerome Park, a popular race track of the day.¹²

The Kern family was well-off, even though they lived on the lower East side of Manhattan. His father had wanted him to join the successful family furniture business. His mother thought Kern had real musical talent and that he might be the next Tchaikovsky! His father sent him to purchase a piano for the family business, after

¹¹ “Jerome Kern Dies; Noted Composer, 60,” *On This Day*. (A Reprint of the obituary of Jerome Kern.) *The New York Times*, November 12, 1945, accessed June 24, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0127.html>

¹² Michael Freedland, *Jerome Kern* (Great Britain: Robson Books, 1978), 5-6.

accidentally ordering 200 pianos for his father's furniture store, his father realized his heart was in music and relented, giving him permission to study music.¹³

Alec Wilder, in his book *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950*, states almost all composers believe Jerome Kern to be, “the first great native master” of popular American song. He stated that Kern was, “...the first to find a new form of melodic writing, unlike any of his predecessors or contemporaries.”¹⁴ Even though most musicians and composers would likely agree with this assessment, Wilder found it interesting that his earliest songs were not of the same caliber of his more mature works. After examining every published Kern song, he wrote, “I was astonished to find in his early work only capable, professional, but uninspired songs in the operetta tradition, by no means superior to those of his contemporaries, and in no way indicative of what was to come.”¹⁵ Wilder goes on to state that he believes Kern's output can be divided into four distinct periods: 1902-1915 – the Princess Theater years; 1915-1927—Showboat; 1927-1935—the first film score; and 1935-to his death in 1945—the Hollywood years.¹⁶

By 1914 over 100 of Kern's songs had been used, as interpolations, in around 30 Broadway shows. This included his first “hit” “They Didn't Believe Me,” from *The Girl from Utah*. Most of these songs were in the European operetta tradition. It would be 1927 before Kern would compose, what is arguably, his great work—*Showboat*. The early

¹³ Michael Freedland, *Jerome Kern*, 5-6.

¹⁴ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1006, Kindle.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1010-1016, Kindle.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1032, Kindle.

“Princess Shows” were written for small theatres, which also included limited casts and orchestras.¹⁷

Unlike many composers of this time period who worked with a small handful of lyricists, Kern seemed to prefer to work with numerous partners. It is clear, however, that he was to be in control of the creative process. Whether this is because of his temperament, or just part of his creative process is unclear. Kern could be light hearted and funny, but he also had a fiery temper. Oscar Hammerstein stated, “I have never been on the receiving end of one of these blasts, but I have seen others get it, and they have my sympathy.”¹⁸

Showboat is generally viewed as turning point in American musical theatre. Many have quipped some variation of, “there’s everything composed before *Showboat* and everything composed after *Showboat*.” Jerome Kern is recognized by most people connected to Broadway as the father of the modern American musical. This show was the first of its kind to fully integrate a plot into the musical numbers. Kern was, at this time, growing interested in having more control over all aspects of the production of his shows—but Ziegfeld would maintain control over this production.¹⁹

Throughout his composition life-span, Kern continually looked for the right moment, the right refrain, and the right words for whatever situation for which he was working. He recycled music, whether it be verses or refrains, to use in future works. He seemed to have a limitless “trunk” of songs throughout his adult life.²⁰

¹⁷ Ronald Byrnside and Andrew Lamb, "Kern, Jerome," *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. (Oxford University Press), accessed July 5, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/14917>.

¹⁸ Stephen Banfield, *Jerome Kern* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

Kern grew up during the infancy of ragtime and jazz, but he resisted using these idioms in his compositions. Dorothy Parker appreciated this and wrote, “I love the soothing quiet—the absence of revolver shots, and jazz orchestration, and ‘scenic’ effects.”²¹ He was interested in creating beautiful songs and he was able, willing, and even eager to sell them. Banfield wrote, “Yet there is an implication in this that he remained all his life a song pedlar [sic], eager to trade in the best, most expensive quality and maintain or set the guild standard but trading all the same: selling his wares, wanting a fair price, continuing to produce.”²²

In his later years Kern’s health would begin to deteriorate. In March of 1937 he suffered a heart attack and possibly a cerebral hemorrhage. He was recovering—more or less out of danger, but still weak, when George Gershwin died. His health was fragile enough that the people closest to him decided not to tell him of George’s passing.²³

In mid-1945 Kern was contacted by Richard Rodgers about writing a score for a new musical on Annie Oakley. This, combined with a revival of *Showboat*, excited Kern. He was eager to go back to Broadway. In early November he made the flight from Los Angeles to New York. On his way to meet Oscar Hammerstein, he collapsed on a Manhattan street on Monday, November 5, 1945. He was taken to City Hospital on Welfare Island because he had no ID. Eventually Kern was relocated and moved to Doctors’ Hospital where he was surrounded by his wife, Eva, Dorothy Fields, and Oscar Hammerstein. He died six days later on November 12, 1945.²⁴

²¹ Stephen Banfield, *Jerome Kern*, 44.

²² Ibid., 57.

²³ Ibid., 62-63.

²⁴ Ibid., 66.

Irving Berlin

...I frankly believe that Irving Berlin is the greatest songwriter that has ever lived...His songs are exquisite cameos of perfection. Each one of them is as beautiful as its neighbor. Irving Berlin remains, I think, America's Schubert.

George Gershwin²⁵

Irving Berlin was one of the greatest American song composers of all time. He composed over 1,000 songs in his 101-year life span, including such greats as "White Christmas" and "God Bless America." While not all of his songs were of the caliber of "White Christmas," he left us with many wonderful treasures that have stood the test of time. He is regarded as the one of the best composer by many famous composers of the time period. George Gershwin called him America's greatest composer, while Cole Porter claimed he was, "the greatest songwriter of all time."²⁶ When writing his biography on Irving Berlin, Alexander Woolcott solicited many for their thoughts on the composer. Jerome Kern wrote a letter praising Berlin. At the end of the letter is Kern's now famous quote, "...Irving Berlin has no place in American music. HE IS AMERICAN MUSIC."²⁷

Irving Berlin was born May 11, 1888 and died September 22, 1989. He was a Russian-Jewish immigrant, who grew up very poor. He had no formal musical training, but despite this fact by the time he was thirty, he had developed a mature compositional style that resonated with the public. His early songs are considered inferior to his more

²⁵ Robert Wyatt and John Andrew Johnson, III, editors, *The Gershwin Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 116.

²⁶ Philip Furia, *Irving Berlin: A Life in Song*, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1998), 1.

²⁷ Jerome Kern, Benjamin Sears, ed., "Letter from Jerome Kern to Alexander Woolcott, from *The Story of Irving Berlin*." *The Irving Berlin Reader*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81-83. Reprinted. Letter originally published by G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1925.

mature works. Many people find it hard to believe that the Berlin who composed “White Christmas” and “God Bless America” was the same Berlin who wrote some of his early songs. Berlin is one of two composers discussed in this paper who, not only wrote the music, but also the lyrics. Making this even more amazing was the fact that he had no formal musical training and played the piano poorly. Even though he couldn’t play well, he knew in his head exactly what he wanted. Once, when working with Bobby Dollan, Berlin was frustrated he couldn’t find the correct chord. He asked Bobby to sit down to play chords and when finally, he came to the one Berlin heard in his head he said, “That’s it!”²⁸

The manager of Berlin’s publishing company, Saul Bornstein, said it was common for Berlin to compose a complete song every day.²⁹ Berlin songs connected with the pulse of what was going on in society. Berlin had to pay a professional musician to harmonize his songs, under his close supervision. He would play the songs on his special-made piano, he called his “Buick.” It was a transposing piano that allowed him to play mostly on the black keys.

Berlin realized the way to profit in the music business was to control copyright for the sheet music. As soon as he was able, Berlin began his own music publishing business (1914). He also began producing his own Broadway shows. Part of the reason Berlin was so successful is he was closely tied to all aspects of the process – song composition,

²⁸ Max Wilk, *They’re Playing Our Song: Conversations with America’s Classic Songwriters*, expanded and enlarged (New York: DaCapo Press, 2012), 6154, ebook.

²⁹ Alex Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 1728, Kindle.

publishing, and producing. He also was keenly aware of what the public wanted and was able to deliver it.³⁰

Although he had been a song plugger himself—albeit not a very good one, Berlin had strong views about song plugging and how money was made in the music publishing business. Song pluggers are pianists who worked for music publishing companies. These pianists would play through the newest songs of the day allowing patrons to “try them out” before purchase. He wrote about song plugging, “I have heard it asserted that a song isn’t written—it is plugged—but that isn’t true by any degree of reasoning. Plugging gives a quick verdict on a song and advertises it; but no matter what you do, you can’t make a success out of a bad song. By consistent plugging you can get a certain revenue out of a fair song—but that’s all. In the end it doesn’t pay. Plugging has its big value in making a success out of a good song.”³¹ It is, perhaps in part, due to his early experiences in song plugging that Berlin was so insistent on having control over all aspects of the creative and business process.

It was with the success of his Broadway show *Watch Your Step* that Berlin moved into a new category, one of more than just a successful song composer, but the beginnings of a legend. For the first time he was succeeding in ways he had dared not dream. He was a very private man and was well aware his financial success could be short-lived. It would take a number of years before Berlin was able to view himself as a success.³²

³⁰ Philip Furia and Michael Lasser, *America’s Songs*, 32-33.

³¹ Laurence Bergreen. *As Thousands Cheer: The Life of Irving Berlin* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1996), 38.

³² *Ibid.*, 111.

Even though Berlin did have near complete control over his music (arranging and publishing) he was not a fantastic businessman. As the industry changed, Berlin did not want to change with it. He resisted changes that would have ultimately helped him to become more successful, such as joining ASCAP when it first became an organization.³³

After numerous years of professional and personal disappointments, Berlin felt he did not belong in the progressive Broadway scene. It was shortly after the death of his second child Irving, Jr. on Christmas day, 1928 that Berlin decided he needed to evolve. Broadway may have been passing him by, but he found Hollywood was a good fit for his more conservative musical style. In 1927 “Blue Skies” was featured in Al Jolson’s *The Jazz Singer*.³⁴

Berlin moved back to Hollywood when the great depression hit. People could not afford to go to shows on Broadway, and there was a need to provide cheap entertainment for all Americans. Even though he did not like “the talkies,” he returned to Hollywood to work on films.

Berlin would not stay in Hollywood for long. He became frustrated when working on the movie *Reaching for the Moon* in 1930 and returned to New York just as the full effect of the depression was hitting. Film studios had released so many film musicals that the public had grown tired of them. After returning to New York, Berlin stated, “musicals were the rage out there, and then they weren’t. Out went the songs. I developed the damndest feelings of inferiority...I had two [songs] ‘Say It Isn’t So’ and ‘How Deep is

³³ Laurence Bergreen. *As Thousands Cheer*, 126.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

the Ocean?’ They’re as good ballads [sic] as any I’ve written, but I didn’t think they were good enough then.”³⁵

In 1932 Berlin was struggling financially and personally. George Gershwin’s *Of Thee I Sing* had won the Pulitzer Prize for literature and was playing in Berlin’s *Music Box Theatre*, which helped to keep Berlin financially afloat. He felt washed up as a composer. Friend Max Winslow heard “Say It Isn’t So” and took the song to Rudy Vallee. Vallee, who was going through a painful divorce at the time, was moved by the lyrics for the song and agreed to sing it on his radio show. The success this song enjoyed after its radio debut helped Berlin to regain some of his confidence.³⁶

In 1934 at the age of forty-six, Irving Berlin appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. The article written about him proclaimed, “...his songs were time capsules preserving evanescent, long-vanished popular moods and sentiments; in a way that historians, journalists, and even novelists could not, he had managed to capture the voices, accents, and rhythms—the sounds—of the American people.”³⁷

Occurring almost simultaneously with the *Times* article was an NBC radio program that did weekly retrospectives of composers of hit songs. Irving Berlin’s music was featured and this helped to revive his reputation and his confidence. “...the songs left millions of listeners marveling not only at Berlin’s record for hits but also the way he has survived the changing fashions.”³⁸

³⁵ Laurence Bergreen. *As Thousands Cheer*, 293.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 305.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 336.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 337.

In December 1934 Berlin once again left New York for California. This time, things were different. Berlin choose RKO (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) as the studio for which he would compose. At the same time the studio signed Fred Astaire, who like Berlin, was reinventing himself. Public tastes were once again shifting and musicals were once again in vogue. Even though Astaire did not have a wonderful voice, Berlin loved his performances, once saying, “I’d rather have Fred Astaire introduce one of my songs more than any other singer I know, not because he has a great voice, but because his delivery and diction are so good that he can put over a song like nobody else.”³⁹

When the country entered World War II, Berlin pulled out a song he had composed for *Yip Yip Yaphank*, composed 21 years earlier, and transformed it into the endearing ballad, “God Bless America.” It was first sung by radio star Kate Smith. Berlin signed over the copyright for this song to the Boy and Girl Scouts of America. This is one of several very generous gestures he would make throughout his lifetime.⁴⁰

Berlin was an unusual paradox. Even after much success he was constantly worried about how he was perceived, not only as a composer, but also how he was personally viewed. He was very protective of his private life, but knew how to work the media to his advantage. As he grew older, his idiosyncrasies grew and his outbursts of temper flared more frequently. When composer Henry Warren became publically critical of Berlin, his friend Cole Porter wrote to Warren stating, “I can’t understand all this resentment to my old friend, ‘the Little Grey Mouse.’ ...If I had my way he would have

³⁹ Laurence Bergreen, *As Thousands Cheer*, 347.

⁴⁰ Chuck Denison, *The Great American Songbook: The Stories Behind the Standard* (Bandon, OR: Robert D. Reed Publishers: 2004), 13.

been given the Congressional Medal of Honor because...he is the greatest songwriter of all time—and I don't mean Stephen Foster.”⁴¹

In the mid-1940s there was an economic resurgence and a renewed interest in the Broadway musical. Composers once again returned to New York. At about the same time the long-playing album was invented. This meant cast recordings of Broadway shows, which meant more interest, and profit! Jerome Kern was approached to compose a score for show centered around Annie Oakley Moses. Kern died before he was able to start on the project and Berlin was chosen as the composer to work on the show. He enjoyed several more successes into the 1950s before his popularity began to wane. Berlin also clashed with several popular singers who took liberties with his tunes. Berlin alienated singers and he became enraged when he heard Elvis Presley's rendition of “White Christmas.” It became obvious things in the realm of popular music were changing once again. Now, the singer was most important—not the song. Berlin had a difficult time changing.⁴²

By the mid-1950s Berlin had almost stopped composing. He relied on his ASCAP earnings for income—and it was a sizeable income. He became increasingly depressed and withdrew from public life. In May 1958 the BBC had planned to run a musical extravaganza about Berlin's music and life. While not opposed to his music being on display, portrayals of his life were an entirely different matter. Three days before the airing of the special Berlin's lawyers intervened and only his music would be featured during the special. Berlin stated, “The BBC never asked my permission to do this. I

⁴¹ William McBrien, *Cole Porter: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 241.

⁴² Lawrence Bergreen, *As Thousands Cheer*, 514.

would find it very embarrassing. I don't want my life story told while I'm alive. When I'm dead, they can tell it all they want.”⁴³

In the later years of his life Berlin became more and more secluded. He had bouts of depression and seemed paranoid about his legacy. He frequently made ranting phone calls to people he felt were trying to wrong him in some way. He was unable—or more likely unwilling—to attend a celebration of his 100th birthday at Carnegie Hall. He even refused an offer to have the broadcast shown on TV at his home. Four months after his 101st birthday, Irving Berlin died on September 22, 1989.

Cole Porter

It is surely one of the ironies of the musical theatre, that despite the abundance of Jewish composers, the one who has written the most enduring ‘Jewish’ music should be an Episcopalian millionaire born on a farm in Peru, Indiana.

Richard Rodgers⁴⁴

The above quote from Richard Rodgers came after Porter once told him he had found the secret to writing successful songs—write Jewish melodies. It did indeed seem, according to Rodgers, that at that time several of the most successful songs were indeed “...minor-keyed, chromatic melodies that sounded ‘unmistakably Mediterranean.’”⁴⁵

In his biography of Cole Porter, Charles Schwartz wrote of his songs, “Cole’s songs blended fresh, witty, urbane lyrics and highly singable melodies into a sparkling,

⁴³ Lawrence Bergreen, *As Thousands Cheer*, 526.

⁴⁴ Philip Furia and Michael Lasser, *America’s Songs*, 79.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

irresistible combination.”⁴⁶ In his book *Red, Hot, & Rich*, David Grafton wrote, “No composer before or since balanced a life in the glitzy world of show business and the glamorous world of high society as well as Cole Porter.”⁴⁷

Cole Porter was born in Peru, Indiana on June 9, 1891. Unlike many other composers of this time period, Cole was from an affluent Midwestern Protestant family. His grandfather was a wealthy businessman and was very particular about Cole’s upbringing. Cole’s mother, Katie, did her best to protect him from the wishes of his overbearing grandfather. Despite his wishes that Cole be educated in Indiana, Katie made sure he was able to attend school on the East coast.

As a young boy, Cole and his mother made numerous trips to Marion, Indiana for his violin lessons. He loved music, but hated playing the violin, and he loved visiting the candy shop during these weekly trips. He discovered these shops also sold tawdry books and he stowed them away in the lining of his violin case. Later in life he alluded that his “delight in the excitement and titillation of these books was eventually to find its way into his lyrics.”⁴⁸ His grandfather considered his grandson’s musical training to be a waste of time, money, and energy. He wanted Cole to be prepared for the adult responsibilities of running a business.⁴⁹

One early influence on Cole’s lyric writing was the headmaster at Worcester Preparatory Academy, Dr. Daniel Webster Abercrombie. He also taught Greek. It was in this class that Cole learned about the relationship between verse and meter. Cole

⁴⁶ Charles Schwartz, *Cole Porter: A Biography* (New York: The Dial Press, 1977), 3.

⁴⁷ David Grafton, *Red, Hot, & Rich: An Oral History of Cole Porter* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1987), 83.

⁴⁸ Charles Schwartz, *Cole Porter*, 15-16.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

eventually said of the lessons learned from Abercrombie, “Words and music must be so inseparably wedded to each other that they are like one.”⁵⁰

Porter finished Worcester, graduating as class valedictorian. He went on to study at Yale, but it seemed he was more interested in social activities—including musical ones, than in studying for the courses in which he was enrolled. Despite poor grades he did manage to graduate on time. To appease his grandfather, he agreed to enroll in law school at Harvard. It was almost immediately apparent that law school was not for Cole. Even the law school dean encouraged him to switch to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. He did make the switch, but Cole and his mother kept this from his grandfather. It seemed Porter was not any better a music student than a law student. His wit and charm coupled with his showmanship at the piano kept Cole busy playing at many parties.⁵¹

Cole met Linda Lee Thomas while visiting France in 1918. The two hit it off immediately. They enjoyed the same things and supported one another. Even though they loved one another, there was no physical relationship. This was due in part to Cole’s homosexuality, but also Linda’s divorce left her unable or unwilling to have an intimate relationship. Eventually the two married on December 18, 1919 in Paris.⁵²

The two adored one another and Linda was very supportive of Cole’s musical endeavors. They set their primary residence in Paris, but traveled all over the world. They spent most of the time traveling between New York and Paris. They hosted and attended parties nearly every evening and were very much a part of high society. Cole found this type of activity conducive to doing creative work. Somehow the parties were a catalyst that sparked his creative juices. Once when dining at a friend’s house, Cole received

⁵⁰ Charles Schwartz, *Cole Porter*, 20.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁵² William McBrien, *Cole Porter: A Biography*, 67-70.

inspiration from Brooke Astor when she made the comment during a rainstorm, “I must have that eave mended at once. That drip, drip, drip is driving me mad.” Cole immediately leapt from the table, ran to the table and completed the song “Night and Day.”⁵³ For Cole Porter, this was a common occurrence. “Night and Day” is also a song that departed from Cole’s regular method of composition. Because this song was to be sung by Fred Astaire—who lacked confidence in his singing and who had a limited vocal range, Cole wrote the melody first. Normally, he would write the rhythm, then the lyric, and finally the melody. Astaire complained that he didn’t think he could sing it and the show’s producers wanted to drop it from the show. Cole insisted it remain in the show, and it has become one of the most enduring songs from the Golden Age of Songs.⁵⁴

For all the accolades and successes, not all of his songs and shows were successful. Of all the shows Cole Porter composed, he felt he had two perfect shows. He stated, “*Anything Goes* was the first of my two “perfect” shows—musicals that had no tinkering whatever on them after opening night. The other, *Kiss Me Kate*, was a tribute to assembled stagecraft of those associated with me.”⁵⁵ For this show and five others, Porter was to use Ethel Merman in the leading role. Cole loved Ethel Merman. He stated,

I’d rather write for Ethel than anyone else in the world.
Every composer has a favorite, and she is mine. Her voice,
to me, is thrilling. She has the finest enunciation of any
American singer I know. She has a sense of rhythm which
few can equal. And her feeling for comedy is so intuitive
that she can get every value out of a line without ever
overstressing a single inference. And she is so damned
apt.⁵⁶

⁵³ David Grafton, *Red, Hot, & Rich*, 76.

⁵⁴ Philip Furia and Michael Lasser, *America’s Songs*, 103-104.

⁵⁵ David Grafton, *Red, Hot, & Rich*, 87.

⁵⁶ Charles Schwartz, *Cole Porter*, 169.

In October 1937 things were not going well. He and Linda were separated and she was seriously considering filing for divorce. Cole was visiting with friends and was about to work on the score for *You Never Know*. During a weekend outing on Long Island, Cole went riding with friends. His horse threw him, fell, and rolled over Cole's legs. Despite the doctor's recommendation he have both legs amputated, Linda and Cole's mother, Kate, decided he would never recover from the loss of his legs. He spent months in the hospital and had numerous operations, but his legs were saved. He would be in constant pain for the rest of his life.⁵⁷

Despite the severe pain, he continued to compose—completing two shows during the first year after the accident. His doctors felt work was the best thing to keep him from becoming depressed. Eventually he went to Cuba for a vacation to recuperate. This helped Cole to recover from the surgeries and his depression. When he returned, he completed the score for *You Never Know*.⁵⁸

Although on the mend, Porter would never fully recover. He did still socialize with friends—still throwing parties, but he did not keep the hectic social schedule he once enjoyed. With the passing of his wife in 1954 and the eventual amputation of his right leg, Cole sunk further into seclusion and deeper into depression. He died on October 15, 1964, not long after a successful kidney stone surgery.⁵⁹

George Gershwin

Out of my entire annual output of songs, perhaps two—at the most, three—come as a result of inspiration. We can never rely on inspiration. When we most want it, it does not come.

⁵⁷ David Grafton, *Red, Hot, & Rich*, 111-114.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 202-208.

One of the most prolific composers of “Great American Songbook” ballads was George Gershwin. The music of George and Ira Gershwin is some of the most enduring from the 1920s and 30s. Jacob, who was always called “George,” was born September 26, 1898, and was the second son of Morris and Rose Gershovitz (later Gershvin, and finally Gershwin). His parents and family members believed George would not be successful in life. His own mother predicted he would end up in jail.

When the Gershwin family saved money to buy a piano, it was assumed Ira would take piano lessons. After all, Ira was the “good son,” the one who followed all the rules. George was bright, but a free spirit, who could not be confined to conventional rules. When a piano was delivered to the family’s second floor apartment, everyone was surprised to find out George already knew how to play. It was then decided George would be the family musician.

By the time he was fifteen, George quit high school and began work as a song plugger at the Jerome H. Remick and company. Although his talents were recognized as being special, he received little encouragement to compose music of his own. Despite the lack of interest in George’s compositions at this time, it didn’t take long before his tunes were being used on Broadway.

Throughout his career, Gershwin struggled between two very different worlds, one of a “serious” composer, and that of popular song writer. He wanted to be taken seriously as a composer, but his heart was firmly rooted in the popular styles of the day.

⁶⁰ Nicholas E. Tawa, *Supremely American: Popular Song in the Twentieth Century: Styles and Singers and What They Said About America* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 13.

No other composer of the time was as successful as Gershwin in melding the two different worlds, as evidenced by his *Rhapsody in Blue*. Ferde Grofé wrote of Gershwin,

It is not over-estimating his music to say that it expressed something distinctly new, something typically of our land and people, and employed an unmistakable American idiom in melody, rhythm, and harmonization. George Gershwin left an indelible impression on our native music, and the proof is, that he has had many imitators, but none who could successfully duplicate his genius.⁶¹

George was an entrepreneur in every sense of the word. He had boundless amounts of energy and often had several projects going at the same time. Often he would be overseeing rehearsals for a show, working on ideas for new songs or shows, and working on a serious composition.

George had a knack for knowing exactly what was required for a show, but that didn't mean everything he wrote was a hit. Many of his early compositions did not earn him money, and some were not well received, but he took this criticism in stride. He was always too busy working on the next project and living a very active life to be worried about who didn't like his music. He and Ira always lived close to one another and where they lived always seemed to be a central hub for activity. It was common for friends and composers to gather and play music for one another. George was the life of the party.

Gershwin died just shy of 39 years of age. In his short life he composed music for thirty stage shows including: seven revues, seventeen musical comedies, four operettas, and two operas; he also composed more than thirty songs for stage shows by other composers, music for five films (with two additional films using Gershwin music after his death), fourteen miscellaneous published songs, seven orchestral works, and other

⁶¹ Merle Armitage, ed., *George Gershwin* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 29.

miscellaneous works. This does not include his “trunk” of song ideas that went unpublished. (Numbers are taken from Grove online.)⁶²

Lyricists

For most composers another group of people were extraordinarily important—the lyricists. When speaking about songs, often people refer only to the composer as the person who wrote it. In most cases (with Cole Porter and Irving Berlin as notable exceptions), this is not true. The lyricist is a collaborator. Unlike classical art song, where a composer uses a preexisting poem and writes a melody to fit the text, composers of popular song usually begin with the tune, and the lyricist fits the words to the tune. Oscar Hammerstein II wrote, “The lyrics of the popular songs and musical comedies in our country today are written after the music.”⁶³ For this reason, it is not likely any lyrics from popular song would be considered “poetry.” Ira Gershwin stated, “Since most of the lyrics in this lodgment were arrived at by fitting words to music already composed, any resemblance to actual poetry, living or dead, is highly improbable.”⁶⁴ Of course it is likely for composers who wrote their own lyrics that there was perhaps a simultaneous blending of work on lyric and melody. Composers often worked with numerous lyricists, but some notable “teams” came from this time period.

Ira Gershwin

Ira Gershwin was the older brother to composer, George. In many ways he was the complete opposite of George. Ira was quiet and more introverted than his famous

⁶² Richard Crawford and Wayne J. Schneider, "Gershwin, George" *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed June 13, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2252861>.

⁶³ Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad*, 30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

brother. When George was just gaining some notoriety as a composer, Ira seemed to be wandering aimlessly. He worked in several different bath houses and liked to read. He had no direction. It wasn't until June of 1918 that Ira began writing lyrics. He finally showed his first completed lyric to George and he liked it.⁶⁵

The two made an extraordinary songwriting team. In their early efforts Ira used the pseudonym Arthur Francis when he wrote lyrics. (Arthur was another brother and Francis was their sister.) He didn't want people to think he got preferential treatment because he was a family member.⁶⁶ The two were very close, living together—or very close to one another, for George's entire life.

After the death of his brother in 1937, Ira went on to collaborate with numerous composers, such as Jerome Kern, Kurt Weill, Harold Arlen, Burton Lane, and Harry Warren. Ira once wrote, "Anyone may turn up with a hit song...A career of lyric-writing isn't one that anyone can muscle in on;...even when his words at times sound like something off the cuff, lots of hard work and experience have made them so."⁶⁷

Ira retired from lyric writing in 1954 after he and Harold Arlen collaborated on *A Star is Born*. Even though he no longer wrote lyrics, he remained active in Southern California. After his retirement he worked to preserve the legacy of George and himself. He died in his Beverly Hills home on August 17, 1983.⁶⁸

Oscar Hammerstein II

⁶⁵ Edward Jablonski and Lawrence D. Steward, *The Gershwin Years: George and Ira* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 58-59.

⁶⁶ Edward Jablonski and Lawrence D. Steward, *The Gershwin Years*, 97.

⁶⁷ Max Wilk. *They're Playing Our Song*, 90.

⁶⁸ <http://gershwin.com/ira/>, accessed May 26, 2016.

Born on July 12, 1895 Oscar Hammerstein II was the grandson of famous opera impresario Oscar Hammerstein I. His father was a successful theatre manager and his uncle was a Broadway producer. The performing arts, especially theatre, were in his blood.⁶⁹ He is best known for his collaborations with Richard Rodgers and Jerome Kern. His first major success was *Showboat*, music composed by Jerome Kern in 1927. It would be nearly sixteen years before he had another major success with Richard Rodgers' *Oklahoma!* in 1943. In the years between the two biggest successes of his career were numerous "failures." By the time *Oklahoma!* achieved success, Broadway was returning to a more lyrical style for which Hammerstein excelled. He felt his style was more primitive than the understated witty sentiment of other lyricists. His texts use long vowels and crisp consonants and is closer in style to that of simple art songs.⁷⁰

In addition to working with European operetta composers, Hammerstein also worked in collaboration with other lyricists. He was mentored by Otto Harbach, and later in his life he mentored a young Stephen Sondheim.⁷¹ Hammerstein admired the work of W.S. Gilbert and Lorenz Hart and realized his work was quite different. He once stated, "I would not stand a chance with either of them in the field of brilliant light verse. I admire them and envy them their fluidity and humor, but I refuse to compete with them."⁷²

Like many other composers and lyricists who got their start on Tin Pan Alley and Broadway, Hammerstein moved to Hollywood to write for movies. Unlike Broadway,

⁶⁹ "Hammerstein, Oscar, II," *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, 4th ed. *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed July 7, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/subscriber/article/epm/37660>

⁷⁰ Philip Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley: A History of America's Great Lyricists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 181-182.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 185.

Hollywood did not want the characters in films to burst out in song for no reason. The dramatic purpose for singing in movies was radically different than on Broadway. This necessitated a change in approach to lyric writing. Although he experienced a few successes in the late 1930s, the early 1940s led to a string of failures.⁷³

When it became apparent Richard Rodgers could no longer work with his long-time collaborator, Lorenz Hart, he asked Hammerstein to write the lyrics for a new show called *Green Grow the Lilacs*, which would be renamed *Oklahoma!*. It was apparent from the first song that this show would be different. He and Rodgers broke from the conventional Broadway model to tell the story in a more natural way. Just like all successful composers and lyricists, they knew they had to give the public what it wanted, and the duo responded brilliantly.⁷⁴

Furia stated that *Oklahoma!* gave musicals an “American” shape and that, “it told a story of reasonably adult interest and did not suffer the story to be intensified by irrelevant songs, dances, ballets and bursts of comic patter. On the contrary, the authors had aimed at making every song, dance, ballet and joke a means of advancing the story.”⁷⁵ This served as another shift in modern Broadway musicals.

Dorothy Fields

Dorothy Fields was born July 15, 1905 in New Jersey. She was not only a lyricist, but also an excellent librettist. Being successful in both is indeed rare, but the fact that she was able to navigate a field dominated by men, at the beginning of the twentieth

⁷³ Philip Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley* 187-188.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 189.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 193.

century, makes her even more rare. She worked with a diverse group of composers ranging from Jerome Kern, Cy Coleman, and Irving Berlin and was the first female to win an Oscar for her lyrics in the 1936 hit “The Way You Look Tonight.”⁷⁶

Fields came from a family connected to the theatre. Her father, Lew, worked in vaudeville and later became a Broadway producer. She frequently worked with her brother, Herbert and another brother, Joseph was a successful playwright. Even though her father and brothers worked in theatre, her parents did not want Dorothy to pursue a career in the theatre.⁷⁷

Women who wrote for the theatre typically wrote in a traditional or “elevated style.” This was considered proper. Dorothy Fields did not write this way. She used slang and colloquial styles of writing. “Dorothy Fields was equally adept at turning a simple slang catch phrase to passionate ends or spinning a list of metaphors laced with flippant rhymes.”⁷⁸

A famous story from Tin Pan Alley is that Fields and Jimmy McHugh were having a difficult time working on a song. They had no inspiration. “Then one evening, while walking down Fifth Avenue, they noticed a young couple window-shopping in front of Tiffany’s. It was obvious they didn’t belong to the carriage trade...as the songwriters drew near, they heard the young man say: ‘Gee, honey, I’d like to get you a sparkler like dat, but right now, I can’t give you nothin’ but love!’” Supposedly the duo went immediately to the piano and completed the song in less than one hour.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Charlotte Greenspan, *Pick Yourself Up: Dorothy Fields and the American Musical*. Foreword by Geoffrey Block (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), foreword, xvi.

⁷⁷ Charlotte Greenspan, *Pick Yourself Up*, xv-xvi.

⁷⁸ Philip Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley*, 214.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

Part of Fields' charm was her ability to phrase naturally. Often going against the natural inclination to make obvious choices, she was able to create deeper levels of connections. Alec Wilder stated, "Her lyrics often swung and their deceptive ease gave a special luster to McHugh's music."⁸⁰

Eventually she would go to Hollywood to work in film. One of her jobs in Hollywood was to write a lyric for a new Kern tune "Lovely to Look At." Unlike the standard 32-bar form that was popular, this chorus contained only 16-bars. This was problematic because she had to say something significant in half of the time that she normally did. One of her finest film collaborations with Kern was on the 1936 film *Swing Time*. The song "A Fine Romance" was needed to highlight the discord between a couple. Fields was able to create a "witty catalog" of images. In the film's other hit, "The Way You Look Tonight," she was able to use simple words to highlight the elegant melody.⁸¹

By the late 1930s Fields wanted to get back to Broadway. She teamed up to write the books for Cole Porter's *Let's Face It* and *Something for the Boys*. She had essentially retired from being a lyricist to become a librettist. When asked if she found it difficult to retire from writing lyrics, she stated, "Oh, honey, let me tell you, it's great...the book is always the toughest thing to do." She went from writing hit songs to writing to fit a spot in a show.⁸² Dorothy Fields died on March 28, 1974 in New York City leaving a legacy rich song texts that will last for generations.

⁸⁰ Philip Furia, *The Poets of Tin Pan Alley* 216-217.

⁸¹ Ibid., *Alley*, 220.

⁸² Ibid., 221-222.

Chapter 3: An Annotated Guide to Selected Ballads of Kern, Berlin, Porter, and Gershwin

Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin have left us hundreds of songs that have endured nearly one-hundred years. Almost anyone you meet knows at least a few of these national treasures. This document has examined only a small portion of some the most unique ballads from the 1920s through the 1940s, and many more songs are certainly worthy of closer examination. It is this author's hope that this document will serve as a starting point for singers and teachers of singing and inspire them to delve more deeply into this repertoire.

This guide should be viewed as a tool to help young students and teachers of young students to find and use appropriate repertoire from the Great American Songbook collection. The songs chosen share common musical traits that make them ideal for study by a young singer. The songs chosen for this guide all come from widely available musical anthologies, which also contain dozens of additional songs that are worthy of exploration.

Teachers using this guide will discover the songs chosen have a range of difficulty from simple to moderate. Most of the songs have relatively simple melodies, so the focus can be on communication, interpretation, and musicality. It is important for young students to learn to respond to music in a number of ways. Elements related to melody, rhythm, harmony, and text should impact how a singer chooses to interpret a song.

Learning how to create an emotional connection through a song is also important. There are a number of choices a singer can make that will impact the song's

interpretation. Since not all choices are equally good, these songs can be used to help young singers learn to make informed musical choices. Allowing the student to experiment with these choices and then discussing the outcome of their choices will help students learn to be more competent interpreters.

The songs from this time period offer a wide range of styles and sentiments for singers of all ages and levels of experience. These songs contain an emotional history of the early decades of our country throughout good times, as well as war and the Great Depression. One only has to listen to any recording by Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, or Michael Feinstein to know these songs made a lasting impact on our cultural history.

During the research portion of this process I discovered there were several elements that were common to this music. One main element was tempo markings. Of the songs examined, all but a few were marked “moderately.” This designation would seem to indicate there is wide variety in the tempo one could take with many of these songs. Indeed, most of these songs have been performed at a variety of tempi and styles.

Another element common to many of these songs is meter. Most of the songs are written in cut time. Even songs written in common time, often are performed in a “two” feel. Only a few songs composed by Berlin were in triple meter. These songs were his most popular “sob” ballads.

Syncopation is found in nearly every piece from this time period. Sometimes the syncopation is gentle and easy to perform, and sometimes it is quite complicated. The syncopation tends to follow natural speech patterns and can usually be quickly learned through repetition of text without the melody.

Many of the songs examined in this study have melodies based on motives and sequences. Sometimes the sequences are exact repetitions of the motives, and sometimes they are transformed into something similar, but different. Often these motives are combined with scalar passages, chromaticism, and wide leaps.

Harmonically these songs are interesting. These four composers each had different approaches to harmony. Only Gershwin was an accomplished pianist with a good deal of background in music theory. His songs are the most complicated harmonically. Ironically, the composer with the least amount of musical training, Berlin, also used more complex harmonies in his songs. Because he knew the sound he wanted in his ear and worked closely with a transcriber, he often used complicated chromatic harmonies.

Most of these composers followed the basic phrase model of tonic/pre-dominant/dominant-tonic. Some composers, especially Berlin and Gershwin, were fond of borrowing from the relative or parallel minor. All of the composers used numerous major-minor, major-major, half and fully diminished sonorities. Numerous songs also contained augmented sonorities, which often served to transition to another section or for modulation.

Most of the songs from this time period followed the “32-bar” song format of AABA. There are occasionally some songs that double the form to 64-bars, and even some that used other models. ABAB is also a common layout for songs from this period. Most songs contain an introduction that varies from two bars to sixteen bars. Some songs have verses and others do not.

The lyrics in these songs cover a wide range of topics. Some are sentimental and sweet, others whimsical, while still others are witty and light-hearted. In spite of the differences in the types of sentiment, all of these songs have love as a central theme. Sometimes it is the romantic love that all human beings long for, sometimes it is about unrequited love, or even lost love. Regardless, these lyrics have helped people to express their feelings for decades—sometimes a song can say what's in a person's heart in a way nothing else can.

While many of these songs come from Broadway musical, others were written for film or were stand-alone songs. It is common for these songs to be performed out of their original context. It is also common for singers to change the key of a song to fit his/her particular needs. Many popular singers of the day would collaborate to create unique arrangements. This kind of collaboration is a wonderful way for young students to learn how music functions and how to create something of their own, while working on communicating a text. This requires an excellent collaborator; as most young singers do not have the skill or experience in music theory to know what will work.

In the future a more complete documentation of the ballads and songs from this time period is still needed. Outside of the four composers examined in this study, there are many other composers whose music has also stood the test of time and are worthy of study.

Songs of Jerome Kern

Composer: Jerome Kern

Lyricist: Oscar Hammerstein, II

Song Title: “Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man of Mine”

Show Title: *Showboat*

Date: 1927

Key: Eb Major Range: Cb4 – F5 Tessitura: F4 – C5

Melody:

The melody of the A section begins simply, but the second half of each phrase ends with chromaticism giving the melody some interest. The B section is four repeated quarter notes with a whole note rising a half step at the end. This idea is sequenced up by step the first two times, but the third time the end leaps to the climax of the melody. It is important that singers slow into the final return of the A section to make the climax of the song more powerful. Many singers take liberties with the melody at the end of the return of the A section, when taken too far, it reduces the impact of this song.

Rhythm:

The song is in common time and marked slowly. The song is usually performed in a swung style. Some singers take so many liberties with the rhythm that one can hardly tell where the beat occurs. As written, the rhythm is not difficult, and swinging it—within reason—helps it to feel more cohesive.

Harmony:

Kern uses numerous major-major seventh chords throughout, which is unusual for him. The harmonic rhythm is also faster than many of Kern’s other tunes. Several measures have two-to-three chords per bar.

Form:

2-bar intro; no verse; 32-bar refrain, AABA

Lyrics:

In the first A section Hammerstein compares the instincts of various animals to how much this woman loves her man. In the repeat of the A section, the woman enumerates all the bad things her man might do, and

states it doesn't matter because she, "can't help lovin' dat man of mine." The B section describes how she feels when he goes away and when he returns. The final A section again describes the things he can do that won't bother her. The song is meant to be very colloquial, and it does sound that way.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 1, p. 72

Notes:

Showboat was Kern's first Broadway hit. Wilder states, "I am not of the opinion that it's a great song...It is not that I believe this song to be mediocre, or badly designed...It's more that it doesn't have the turn of phrase or over-all quality of a relaxed rhythm ballad."⁸³

This is a standard ballad that many a jazz singer performs and often young singers sing. It is also usually sung in an overly dramatized fashion, which weakens the impact of the song. Also, it's hard to listen to a 16-20-year old sing, "I've got to love one man till I die." It doesn't seem believable.

⁸³ Alec Wilder. *American Popular Song*, 1338-1341, Kindle.

Composer: Jerome Kern

Lyricist: Oscar Hammerstein, II

Song Title: “The Song is You”

Show Title: *Music in the Air*

Date: 1932

Key: C Major Range: D4 – F5 Tessitura: D4 – C5

Melody:

The first two A sections contain a quasi-neighbor pattern, followed by a held note, and then a descending chromatic line, which leads into the next neighbor figure.



Example 1: Jerome Kern, “The Song is You.” Measures 3-4, Quasi neighbor figure.

The last four bars of the first phrase use a series of incomplete neighbors, neighbor tones and small skips. The repeat of the A section is identical until the cadence. The intensity of the B section increases with larger leaps. At the end of the B section, Kern repeats the leading tone (b) with the text “why can’t I” to highlight the return of A. In the final A section the held note in the second measure is transposed up an octave from the original A section. This serves as the climax for the song. The final four bars still use the neighbor tone motive, but it has been changed slightly.

Rhythm:

The song is in common time and is marked flowing. It uses rubato throughout, unlike many of the popular songs of the period. The key rhythmic feature for this piece is the careful use of the triplet throughout. Just when it seems the end of each sub-phrase will use a triplet, Kern switches and uses a grouping of three eighth notes to end the phrase. In the accompaniment Kern uses the triplet figure in the right hand of the last four bars of each phrase to unify its use in the voice. He does not use the triplet in the accompaniment at the same time as in the voice part.

Harmony:

Kern uses numerous seventh and ninth chords throughout the A sections and very few triads. He uses the ii-V-I turn-around frequently, but sometimes embellishes it with chromaticism. Until the B section, the use

of harmony is fairly standard for the time period. In the B section, Kern uses more extended jazz harmonies and chromaticism. The final A returns to the more standard harmony of the first two A sections.

Form:

2-bar intro; no verse; 32-bar AABA'

Lyrics:

Hammerstein makes use of the internal and ending rhyme in a way that seems completely natural and not superficial. For example, "I hear music when I look at you, a beautiful theme of every dream I ever knew" doesn't sound ridiculously silly like, "...but you're as cold as yesterday's mashed potatoes," in the lyrics from "A Fine Romance," they sound sweet and endearing. In the B section the singer can hardly contain his/her enthusiasm for his/her love, singing "must it be, forever inside of me." The end of the B section explodes into the return of the A section with the lyric "Why can't I let you know the song my heart would sing," beginning on a repeated note. The singer seems to be shouting from the rooftop!

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 2, p. 316

Notes:

This song comes from the mature period of Kern's compositional style, but its lyricism hints at a more "art song" approach. The singer must have a good command of his/her technique to negotiate the chromatic elements and wide range that occur primarily in the return of the A section in the last eight bars. Legato singing with a clear vibrant tone is essential for this piece. This piece takes a skilled pianist to play.

Alec Wilder wrote he believed this piece to be more of a "vehicle-for-the singer" rather than a "song-in-itself," but also states he is not, "denying its innate presence and superior quality as a piece of writing."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 1415, Kindle.

Composer: Jerome Kern

Lyricist: Otto Harbach

Song Title: “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”

Show Title: *Roberta* (stage and film version)

Date: 1933

Key: Eb Major Range: Bb3 – F5 Tessitura: D4 – D5

Melody:

The melody is very disjunct. There are numerous leaps that require a keen ear to tune properly. The modulation to B major is made easy for the singer as the melody of the A section ends on Eb and begins on D# for the B section. When the melody modulates back to Eb major, there is a leap of tritone down, which can be difficult for inexperienced singers to negotiate. Adding to the level of difficulty is the wide range of this melody.

Rhythm:

The rhythm is not difficult. Kern does use triplets in two instances making the word underlay a challenge for the inexperienced singer. It would be advisable for the singer to separate the rhythm/text from the melody to be sure they are properly executing it.

Harmony:

The song begins in Eb major and is maintained through both of the A sections. The B section is in B major. The modulation is abrupt (direct modulation) and is to a key an augmented fifth away. It seems as though this would sound awkward, but it does not. The modulation back to the key of Eb major is through an enharmonic pivot chord (Abm7/G#m7).

Form:

4-bar intro; no verse; 32-bar refrain AABA – The B section is in a different key.

Lyrics:

Harbach makes use of the internal rhyme during the A sections. The B section uses no rhymes, internal or otherwise. The language is from an older generation than that for which it was written. Wilder calls it, “a superb lyric, whether or not ‘chaffed’ comes as a shock.”⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 1493, Kindle.

Scores:

GAS, the Singers, p. 293

Notes:

Not a song for an inexperienced singer. The melody has a wide range and the tessitura is high. There are several wide leaps that would be difficult for a young singer to negotiate. There is also a good deal of chromaticism throughout and an abrupt key change. There may be intonation issues for young singers.

Kern was known for not making adjustments in his melodies. Harbach asked Kern if he would consider changing some short notes to long notes. He felt this would create the appropriate style for a ballad. On this occasion, Kern agreed and this song was born. Wilder also stated this song is “on the edge of artiness...which really does move us back into the world of operetta.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 1493, Kindle.

Lyrics:

It is the quintessential love song. The text of the song is charming in its simplicity. The picture Fields creates with the lyric are inventive and sincere. The lyrics enumerate all the times he/she will think of the “way you look tonight.” The B section also contains enumeration, but this time it is all the ways the man/woman continues to get better. The final A section begs the man/woman to not change, because “I love you. And the way you look tonight.”

Scores:

GAS, the Singers, p. 358

Notes:

The song received an Oscar for Best Song in 1936. It also marked the first time a woman had received the honor.⁸⁷

One challenge for this song is the phrases are short and sequenced. They must be sung in a way that makes them feel longer, but they can’t be too legato. The way to achieve this is through proper text accentuation. Another potential problem for a young singer is negotiating the leap into upper passaggio in the bridge.

“The song flows with elegance and grace. It has none of the spastic, interrupted quality to be found in some ballads, but might be the opening statement of the slow movement for a cello concerto; that is, if the composer were daring enough to risk being melodic. What technically is the release, but which seems more simply a natural development of the main strain, moves into the key of G flat from the key of E flat, and works its way back in the way only Kern can effect such transitions.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Chuck Denison, *The Great American Songbook*, 109.

⁸⁸ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 1526-1529, Kindle.

Composer: Jerome Kern

Lyricist: Dorothy Fields

Song Title: “A Fine Romance”

Show Title: *Swing Time* (movie)

Date: 1936

Key: C Major Range: B3 – E5 Tessitura: E4 – C5

Melody:

The melody is built on sequences. The first eight bars contain numerous leaps, each sequencing up a little higher each time. The second eight bars contain an augmented triplet figure with a falling chromatic line. The whole section repeats with the end being slightly different.

Rhythm:

The tune is in cut time. It is a moderate tempo and should not be taken too fast. There is gentle syncopation, as Kern makes frequent use of quarter note-half note-quarter throughout.



Example 3: Jerome Kern, “A Fine Romance.” Recurring rhythmic figure of quarter note-half note-quarter note.

He also combines the use of a triplet with a chromatic line, highlighting the silly lyrics. [“We should be like a *couple of* hot tomatoes.”]

Harmony:

The choice of harmony is unusual for the four-bar introduction. The first chord is a G7 chord with an F in the bass. There is also an E in the chord that resolves to a D, which could be analyzed as an unprepared suspension. This chord moves to a C#dim7 (vii7/ii in C Major) and resolves to a Dm7. The intro concludes with a minor v/V before settling on a dominant harmony. After this, the harmony is rather mundane. Kern does use a few chromatic diminished sonorities and augmented triads, but other than this, the harmony follows a standard phrase model formula.

Form:

4-bar intro; no verse; 4 repetitions of refrain-2 male, 2 female; AA’AA’

Lyrics:

The lyrics are so silly as to be charming. There is a whimsical banter back and forth between the singers. Each singer is trying to outdo the other with crazy analogies. (At least they seem silly to a twenty-first century singer.) In the context of the movie, this song makes more sense. Out of context, the lyrics seem odd. There is no resolution during the song about what might come to be of this couple.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 1, p. 120

Notes:

This song can provide an opportunity for two young singers to work on their acting skills. The song is not difficult, which will allow the students to work on musicality and collaboration.

Composer: Jerome Kern

Lyricist: Oscar Hammerstein, II

Song Title: “All the Things You Are”

Show Title: *Very Warm for May*

Date: 1939

Key: GM/Ab Major Range: B3 – F5 Tessitura: D4 – D5

Melody:

The melody in the verse is motivic. The verse is 16 measures long and in two sections. The 2-measure melodic motif occurs 6 times, three times in each part. Five times it begins on D4, but after the first three notes it ascends by step each time. The fifth time this motif occurs, it begins on B3, but then continues the same melodic shape. The end of the motif changes the last time it occurs.

The melody in the refrain follows the typical four 8-bar sections, but the melody is varied quite a bit within the AABA structure. There are numerous chromatic pitches, which correspond to the jazz harmonies used throughout the piece. Many large intervals and chromaticism make this melody somewhat difficult to sing. One interesting thing about the melody of the chorus is the intervallic pattern it follows. In measures 1-8 the melody begins with a P4 followed by a descending line, until it falls to “do” and then it rises by a P4 followed by another fall to “do” and finally ends with an unexpected leap of a tri-tone and another fall to “ti.” It is this note in the melodic line that plays with the listener’s expectations and causes it to be memorable.



Example 4: Jerome Kern, “All the Things You Are.” Measures 21-28, leaps of P4 and A4.

Measures 9-16 of the refrain begin in the same way as measures 1-8, but again Kern plays with the listener’s expectations in measures 15-16. On the text “brink of a lovely song” he sets up the modulation for the bridge of the chorus, G Major. There are several instances of the same rhythmic pattern being used, but with different (although similar) melodic content. To work back to the original key of the chorus, Kern ends on g# in the

melody with a dominant seventh sonority, and of course, this is enharmonically the same first melody note of the chorus.

Alec Wilder wrote it seems that the verse for this song (both melody and lyric) were written at another time, perhaps for another tune.⁸⁹ I tend to disagree and feel the tie between the verse and the bridge fit beautifully.

Rhythm:

The piece is in cut-time. Most of the refrain has regular rhythmic ideas. Each phrase of the B section begins with a three note anacrusis. Kern makes frequent use of dotted rhythms, but only one triplet figure near the end of the form.

Harmony:

This piece makes use of a circle of fifths progression. Kern uses many jazz harmonies to make this piece sound unique. In the refrain he uses almost no triads, but rather chords with sevenths, ninths, elevenths, and thirteenths. The verse and the chorus are in different keys – not closely related. Kern does tie in the harmony of the verse with the “B” section of the refrain (G major). The refrain begins in f minor, but ends in the relative major (Ab major).

Form:

4-bar intro; 16-bar verse; 32-bar refrain – AA’BA’’

Lyrics:

Hammerstein’s lyrics are masterful. The lyrics for the verse are not unlike other ballads already examined. The singer is thinking through ‘a list things’ that will make him/her happy. Until he/she realizes, “all that I want, in all of this world is you.” This is followed immediately by another “you,” highlighting the lover’s importance. The refrain enumerates all the reasons the singer is in love. The use of words like “kiss” and “hush” allow the singer to use exaggerated diction to highlight the meaning of the lyric.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 1, p. 28

Notes:

A jazz standard that has been recorded by all the great jazz singers. It is fortieth on Charles Hamm’s Most Recorded Songs 1900-1950 and Arthur Schwartz has called it, “the perfect song.” It is the only well-known piece

⁸⁹ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 1576, Kindle.

from *Very Warm for May*.⁹⁰ This piece is not for a beginning student. There are many wide leaps and numerous instances of chromaticism. To effectively perform this piece, the singer needs to have a good ear. Being sensitive to the changes in the harmony and how they relate to the lyrics make for a better performance. This piece also requires a skilled collaborator, preferably one with improvisation skills.

A widely circulated story is Kern believed that this song was too complex to become popular and stated such to a friend.⁹¹ Who knows if this is true, but the song did become wildly popular—but Kern was right, it is complex!

⁹⁰ Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad*, 73.

⁹¹ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 1561, Kindle.

Composer: Jerome Kern

Lyricist: Johnny Mercer

Song Title: "I'm Old Fashioned"

Show Title: *You Were Never Lovelier*

Date: 1942

Key: F Major Range: A3 – D5 Tessitura: C4 – A4

Melody:

The melody for the verse is built on a miniature aaba form. The 'b' is a sequence of the 'a' idea. The melody is motivic in nature with chromaticism. The refrain is interesting because it is built on a motive that uses interval inversion and expansion. There are numerous leaps and turns of direction that make this tune interesting for the listener and challenging for the singer.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately. The verse has more rhythmic activity than the refrain, primarily using quarter notes and eighth notes. The refrain does not use any eighth notes. There is syncopation in the refrain with the use of quarter note-half note-quarter note throughout, especially on the text "I'm old fashioned." Kern uses this same rhythmic motif in "A Fine Romance."



Example 5: Jerome Kern, "I'm Old Fashioned." Recurring rhythmic idea throughout the refrain.

Harmony:

The harmonic rhythm is primarily two chords per measure throughout. Kern uses chromatic third relationships in the harmony for the verse (a brief shift, not a modulation). Most of the harmony for the first two sections of the refrain are standard. The harmony becomes interesting at the 'C' section. The series of chords goes from A-E; A-D; E-f#dim; before working back around to the standard ii-V-I, which leads to the final A section.

Form:

4-bar introduction; 16-bar verse, plus a 2-bar transition; ABCA' (unusual) with A' being 12-bars.

Lyrics:

Simple, yet satisfying lyrics occur in both the verse and the refrain. The singer enumerates all the ways he/she is old fashioned, and then asks the recipient of the song to “stay old-fashioned with me.” The song is understated and sincere. Very sweet.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 1, p. 186.

Notes:

Allen Forte writes, “...one of Kern’s most eloquent and poetic musical statements.”⁹²

The song is not difficult to sing and therefore provides a young student the opportunity to work on musicality. The text may seem facile to a younger singer, but if he/she can work on unique ways of expressing the text, it can work well. Finding ways to keep the repetition of the text “I’m old fashioned” fresh without losing the quaintness and charm of the text and melody will be one challenge a young singer might encounter.

⁹² Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad*, 79.

Composer: Jerome Kern

Lyricist: Ira Gershwin

Song Title: “Long Ago and Far Away”

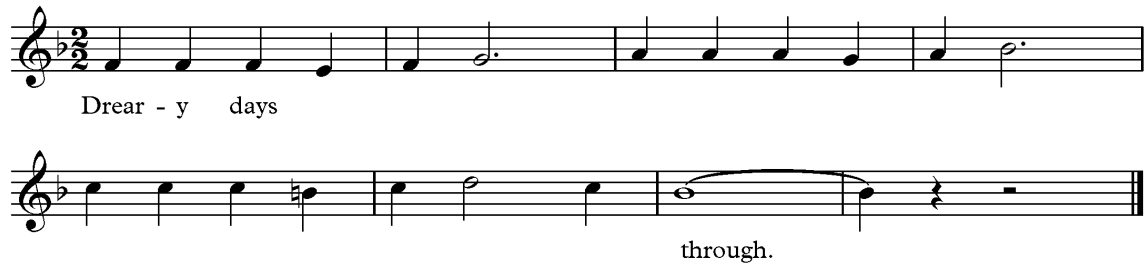
Show Title: *Cover Girl* (film)

Date: 1944

Key: F Major Range: Bb3 – D5 Tessitura: F4 – C5

Melody:

The melody of the verse is very simple. There are two-bar motifs that begin with three repeated pitches (all quarter notes) before going down a step and then rising by step. This motif occurs three times before there is a change. The final four bars of the verse use a modified version of this pattern.



Example 6: Jerome Kern, “Long Ago and Far Away.” Measures 1-7, Two-bar motif repeated three times.

The melody for the refrain begins each set of eight bars the same way, with a dotted half note followed by a quarter note. The melody is a modified sequence with the first and third set of eight bars being identical.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately. Rhythmically, there is nothing difficult in this song. The rhythm could be considered a unifying feature, but it is just simple and straightforward.

Harmony:

The harmony is standard. There are a few instances of diminished chords and one ninth chord. The second set of 8-bars in the refrain moves from Ab Major-G minor-C Major before returning to F major for the third set of 8-bars.

Form:

4-bar intro; 12-bar verse; 32-bar – AA’AA’’

The first and third set of 8-bars are identical. The second and fourth are modified sequences of the first. The A' is up a minor third from the original. A'' is up a perfect fifth from the original. The last eight bars also have a slightly different ending to accommodate the final cadence.

Lyrics:

The lyrics are charming. It is also clear they are Ira Gershwin. The lyrics are sweet and loving, but not sappy or silly. In fact, they are quite inventive. The phrases seem to flow together like a story and are very natural sounding. The final phrase of the song, "Just one look and then I knew that all I longed for long ago was you," is all one needs to hear to understand the charm of these lyrics.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 2, p. 191.

Notes:

The text is of primary importance in this piece. One is able to create a sense of authenticity through careful selection of word accentuation. It is a charming song and can be a good vehicle for a young singer to learn how to effectively phrase.

Songs of Irving Berlin

Composer: Irving Berlin

Lyricist: Irving Berlin

Song Title: “What’ll I Do?”

Show Title: *Music Box Revue*

Date: 1924

Key: C Major Range: C4 – D5 Tessitura: C4 – A4

Melody:

A key feature of the refrain is the use of the triplet. After the opening scalar motion, the melody uses a downward sequence of large leaps.



Example 7: Irving Berlin, “What’ll I Do?” Motive sequence using triplet and large leap.

The B section of the refrain rises to the top of the range before receding back to the melody from the A section. The B section follows the same rhythmic scheme as the A sections. Berlin uses some chromaticism throughout, but none of it is difficult. The chromaticism makes the line flow naturally, even when there are large leaps. The leaps are predictable and regular, making them singable for even an inexperienced singer.

Rhythm:

The meter is 3/4 waltz, which is unusual for a ballad. There are two key rhythmic features in the refrain. The first the use of the triplet. The second is the use of a half note tied to an eighth note, followed by another eighth note. Berlin’s use of contractions fit the triplet figure, and he felt it made the song seem more “American.”

Harmony:

The harmony is primarily comprised of triads, and major and minor seventh chords. Berlin makes use of suspensions, and chromatic chords.

The B section follows the same melodic design as the A sections, but moves temporarily to the key of the subdominant.

Form:

4-bar intro; 16-bar verse; 32-bar refrain, AABA

Lyrics:

The lyrics for the verse are sad and reflective. The difficulty of this piece comes in its interpretation. The meaning of the text is intense and laments lost love. Although most young people do experience what they feel to be intense heartache, it is unlikely many young people experienced the kind of loss to which Berlin eludes in this ballad.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 2, p. 350

Notes:

Because of the reflective nature of this song, the tempo must contain some rubato. The extra time will give the listener time to reflect on the mood of the singer. This song is one of the first “sob” ballads that Berlin was so fond of writing. Berlin had a noted change in style around this time. He realized vaudeville was going away and that public tastes were changing. This is the first change in style that he would experience.

Pedagogically, this song can be used to teach a student about phrasing and text communication. The lyrics are intense and communicate the loss of a passionate love. The main challenge lies in being able to sing an effective musical line through the numerous skips and leaps of the melody. Teaching a student about word accentuation and stress in this song is paramount.

Composer: Irving Berlin

Lyricist: Irving Berlin

Song Title: “All Alone”

Show Title: (No show)

Date: 1924

Key: F Major Range: E4 – F5 Tessitura: F4 – D5

Melody:

The melody of the verse has a high tessitura. This could be alleviated by changing the key. The melody in both the verse and the refrain are not difficult. Berlin employs the use of sequence in both the verse and refrain making the melody easy on the ear. He embellishes the melody by using upper-neighbor and incomplete neighbor tones frequently.

Rhythm:

The rhythm is simple triple and contains primarily half notes, quarter notes, and eighth notes. Some rhythms are tied, but none are difficult. After listening to several recordings the song can be done in a slow 3 or in more of a waltz tempo. The tempo is marked Moderate Waltz, but many singers took the song so slow it did not feel like a waltz. Numerous artists took liberties with the rhythm changing two quarter notes into two sixteenth notes.

Harmony:

Berlin uses many chromatically altered harmonies to fit this melody. He makes frequent use of the $f\sharp$ half-diminished seventh chord, especially at the mid-point of a phrase. He also uses ninth chords and occasionally some augmented sonorities. Considering Berlin had no formal training and relied only on what sounded good to his ear, the song is in line with the jazz harmonies of the early 1920s.

Form:

8-bar intro; 2-bar vamp; 16-bar verse; 32-bar refrain AB

Lyrics:

The lyrics are typical of the sob ballad that Berlin was writing during this period of his career. The lyrics are simple, plaintive, and enumerate the things one does to pass the time, while realizing he/she is all alone. There are frequent repetitions of the phrase ‘all alone,’ which highlight the sadness of the lyric.

Scores: GAS, Jazz, p. 4

Notes:

A challenge in this piece is being able to negotiate the upper passaggio due to the high tessitura. In the refrain there are numerous short sub-phrases. The difficult thing is knowing when to breathe to make use of the text and when to carry the text through. The tempo is marked moderate waltz, but one should be careful not to go too fast.

Composer: Irving Berlin

Lyricist: Irving Berlin

Song Title: "Always"

Show Title: (No Show)

Date: 1925

Key: F Major Range: C4 – Eb5 Tessitura: C4 – C5

Melody:

The verse has numerous leaps of more than a P5. There is some chromaticism, but it makes sense to the ear, because it is either in sequence or tonicising a closely related key. The use of sequence is found throughout.



Example 8: Irving Berlin, "Always." Melodic sequence

Rhythm:

Triple meter (3/4) waltz. The rhythm of both the verse and refrain is simple. The most complicated rhythm is dotted quarter followed by an eighth note.

Harmony:

The harmony for the verse is standard, using primarily triads, major-minor seventh chords, and diminished sonorities. The harmony in the refrain is similar, but there is more frequent use of chromatic harmonies. Even though there are numerous chromatically altered chords, the piece is not difficult to play.

Form:

8-bar intro; 24-bar verse; 32-bar refrain; AA' (AA'A''A''') The form of the verse is AAB.

Lyrics:

There is a simplicity in the lyrics for "Always" that is charming. The fact that the song was a wedding present for his wife make them authentic. The lyrics convey the pureness of heart one has when one marries. There are two verses for this song. The first verse begins with a serious tone. It speaks of how sad the singer is and all the things that have gone wrong. At

the end of the verse the singer has finally found his love. The second verse picks up where the first verse left off. It is hopeful and jovial. The lyrics of the refrain are sweet and sentimental. The singer professes that he will love, “you, always.”

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 2, p. 24

Notes:

The song was originally written for a business associate’s girlfriend. He wrote “I’ll be loving you, Mona.” The song was forgotten about until sometime in 1925 when Berlin pulled out the half-completed song and changed the lyric to “I’ll be loving you, always.”⁹³ The song was given to his wife, Ellin, as a wedding present. Not only did he dedicate the song to her, he also assigned the royalties to her.

Wilder wrote about “Always” and “What’ll I Do?,” that they, “...are minor masterpieces of economy, clarity, and memorability.”⁹⁴

One major challenge for this piece is the repetition of text. Trying to make them not all sound the same is difficult for young students. This is an excellent song for working with a student on text interpretation. There is enough chromaticism in the sequences, which may prove difficult for some students.

⁹³ Laurence Bergreen, *As Thousands Cheer*, 248.

⁹⁴ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 1738, Kindle.

Composer: Irving Berlin

Lyricist: Irving Berlin

Song Title: “Blue Skies”

Show Title: *Betsy*

Date: 1926

Key: G Major Range: D4 – Eb5 Tessitura: E4 – D5

Melody:

The melody for the verse outlines the tonic triad for the first two four-bar phrases. The third four-bar phrase tonicizes B minor before ending on D major (the dominant of G Major). The last phrase mirrors the first two.

The refrain begins in the relative minor (e minor) with a leap of a P5 followed by a lower neighbor tone before returning to the dominant of e minor at the midpoint of the first phrase. The first phrase ends on tonic in G major.

The image shows the first two staves of the melody for 'Blue Skies'. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It contains the first four bars of the melody. The notes are: E4 (quarter), G4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), and D5 (quarter). Above the staff, the chords are labeled: Em, G7(#5)/D#, B7/D#, and G/D. Below the staff, the lyrics are: 'Blue', 'skies', 'smil-ing', and 'at'. The bottom staff is also in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It contains the next four bars of the melody. The notes are: C#5 (quarter), B4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), and G4 (quarter). Above the staff, the chords are labeled: C#m7(b5) and Cm6/Eb. Below the staff, the lyrics are: 'me', 'noth-ing', and 'but'. The melody ends with a double bar line.

Example 9: Irving Berlin, “Blue Skies.” Melody beginning in E minor and cadencing in G major.

The repeat of the A section does the same thing. Berlin uses a combination of scalar ideas and leaps within the tonic triad (in G major) to connect the ideas. In the B section of the refrain, Berlin uses only scalar passages, embellishing the ideas with passing tones and neighbor tones.

Rhythm:

The piece is in 4/4 time and marked moderately. The piece does not indicate it should be swung, but many performers do take liberties with the rhythm of the refrain. The rhythms are simple. There is very little syncopation which occurs at the ends of phrases (eighth note/quarter note/eighth note, e.g. “do I see”)

Harmony:

The piece begins in e minor and immediately begins using chromatic chords as jazz substitutes. By the time the eight bar introduction is complete, Berlin has worked around to G Major. The refrain also begins in the minor mode. Forte says one of the most striking features of this song is the chromatic bass line of the first five bars of the refrain, which move e—d#--d—c#--d. Berlin also uses a lowered seventh in the subdominant—and a minor subdominant, which serves to sharpen the effect of the dominant.⁹⁵ Berlin uses a combination of circle of fifths and third relations to come back around to the minor mode for the return of the A after the bridge.

Form:

8-bar intro; 2-bar vamp; 16-bar verse; 32-bar refrain, AABA. Uses short phrases.

Lyrics:

The lyrics are simple and genuine. They are memorable, perhaps in part, because of their simplicity. These lyrics would help keep America hopeful through the deepest part of the depression.

Scores:

GAS, the composers, vol. 1, p. 60

Notes:

Most of the other music for the show was composed by Rodgers and Hart. Ziegfeld did not tell them he had included a song by Berlin. The song is sixth on the “Top Forty: The Most Often Recorded Songs in America, 1900-1950.” Blue Skies was also the first song to be used in a movie with sound—a talkie. The movie was *The Jazz Singer* and the song was sung by Al Jolson.⁹⁶

This song is versatile because it can be performed in a variety of ways. It can be performed in several different styles and tempi. Because it is not a difficult song, it is an excellent song to allow students to experiment making choices about phrasing, tempo, mood, and dynamics.

⁹⁵ Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad*, 89.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 87-88.

Composer: Irving Berlin

Lyricist: Irving Berlin

Song Title: “The Song is Ended (But the Melody Lingers On)”

Show Title: (Stand Alone Song)

Date: 1927

Key: Eb Major Range: D4 –D5 Tessitura: Eb4 – C5

Melody:

The refrain employs several skips throughout and uses a triplet to add a nice flow to the melody. The melody is not difficult and is colored by mild chromaticism in the B section. The only thing that could prove difficult is the word underlay.

Rhythm:

The song is in 3/4 time and marked moderate waltz. The typical boom-chuck-chuck rhythm (bass after beat) is used throughout, but Berlin surprises with the addition of the triplet used during the refrain. Rhythmically the song is not challenging for the singer or pianist.

Harmony:

The harmonic rhythm is slow with chords changing one chord per bar except for a couple of instances. Berlin uses several half and fully diminished sonorities and some ninth chords. The harmony is fairly standard.

Form:

4-bar intro; 20-bar verse; 32-bar refrain - AABA

Lyrics:

The verse relates the memory of a dance, the “moment of bliss,” which did not end in the singer’s mind. The refrain is full of cliché sappy phrases such as, “melody seemed to say,” “summer will pass away, and “happiness while you may.”

Scores:

GAS, the Singers, p. 296.

Notes:

The song will help young singers work on singing a legato line. There are many skips and leaps and learning to negotiate them can be difficult. Working on clarity of text can also be beneficial to young students.

Composer: Irving Berlin

Lyricist: Irving Berlin

Song Title: “How Deep is the Ocean (How High is the Sky)”

Show Title: (Stand Alone Song)

Date: 1932

Key: Eb Major Range: D4 – Eb5 Tessitura: Eb4 – C5

Melody:

The range is relatively small. The song only touches on the Eb5 in the B sections of the piece. This shift to the upper register helps to create an additional level of intensity. There are carefully placed instances of chromaticism in the melody, which are intensified by the text and harmony.

Rhythm:

The song is in common time and is marked moderately. The rhythm for this piece is very simple, primarily quarter notes and eighth notes. There is gentle syncopation with quarter notes tied across the bar. Berlin uses the augmented (or super) triplet throughout. It covers beats three and four of most phrases. The use of the triplet gives the song a colloquial sound that resonates with the general public.

Harmony:

The four-bar introduction is in Eb major, but ends with an augmented chord that suggests modulation. The beginning of the A section is in C minor. The B section modulates via chromatic chord moving to Eb major. Berlin uses an augmented sonority (on the text, “sprinkled with dew”) to move back to C minor for the return of the A and repeats the process for moving to the final B section.

Form:

4-bar intro; no verse; 32-bar refrain ABAB’ (or it could be considered A A’ with 2-16 bar phrases). The original publication had a verse, but by 1940 it was published without the verse.

Lyrics:

The song is a set of straightforward questions, but there is much contained in those questions. Only one phrase in the refrain does not end in a

question. The questions accentuate the genuine feelings the singer has for the one he loves. The verse, which was not published after 1940, sets up the refrain beautifully. The singer wonders how he/she can communicate the depths of the passionate love and devotion felt for his/her significant other.

There is interplay between the text and harmony of this piece. The questions at the beginning are underscored by minor key harmonies. By the end the harmonies are major and the piece clearly ends in Eb major.

Scores:

GAS, Jazz, p. 145 (without the verse)

Notes:

One of Berlin's biggest hits. This song was composed when Berlin felt he had lost his edge. He had lost everything in the stock market and was very critical of everything in his life. Berlin stated in 1945 that it was a time when he felt "rusty" as a song composer.⁹⁷

Originally published in the key of F major. The original song had a 16-bar introduction and 16-bar verse. These were cut by 1940 and the key was changed to a more 'singable' Eb major. I have been unable to locate the original with the verse. According to Alec Wilder, it is, "A superb example of what can be done within the confines of popular music form."⁹⁸

This song is excellent for working on the communication of intense text. There are several ways of shaping phrases based on the choice of word accentuation. Allowing a student to experiment with making choices can help them to develop those skills.

⁹⁷ Howard Pollack, Edward Sears, ed., "Unity of Word and Tone in Two Ballads by Irving Berlin," *The Irving Berlin Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press), 89.

⁹⁸ Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song, 1925-1931*, Kindle.

Composer: Irving Berlin

Lyricist: Irving Berlin

Song Title: "Cheek to Cheek"

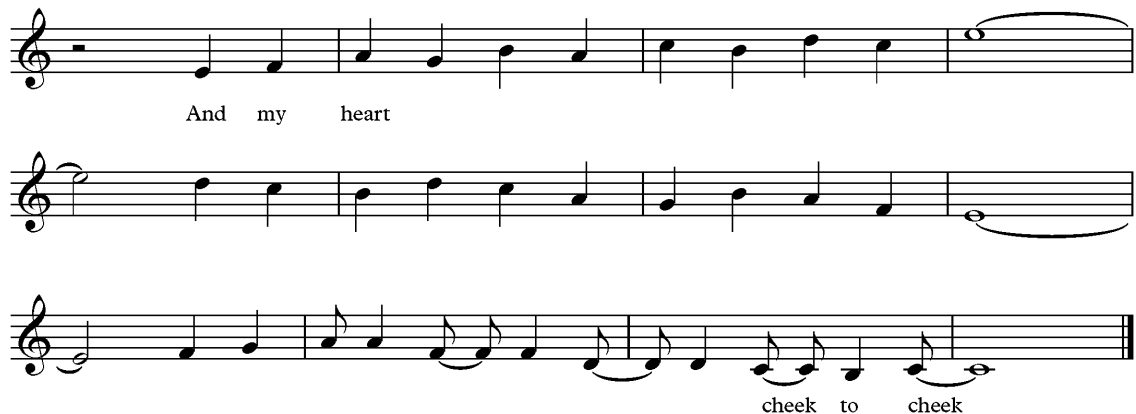
Show Title: *Top Hat* (film)

Date: 1935

Key: C Major Range: B3 – E5 Tessitura: F4-C5

Melody:

The melody uses short motivic devices throughout. "Heaven, I'm in heaven" is a pattern that is repeated throughout. This is followed by a rising melodic line in interlocking thirds. It immediately folds back down in thirds and ends with the syncopated line, "when we're out together dancing cheek to cheek."



Example 10: Irving Berlin, "Cheek to Cheek." Measures 12-23, Interlocking thirds motif.

Rhythm:

Simple quadruple time, but with a cut time feel. Some syncopation at the end of the second eight bars for each of the A sections. The B section utilizes the syncopation a little more and it propels the flow of the line.



Example 11: Irving Berlin, "Cheek to Cheek," Measures 40-48. Syncopation in the "B" section.

The C section becomes more declamatory and does not continue with the syncopation, but uses instead an augmented (super) triplet. It feels natural with the text, so it may be a little difficult for a young student. It flows off the tongue easily once you learn it.



Example 12: Irving Berlin, "Cheek to Cheek." Measures 61-64. Augmented triplet.

Harmony:

Berlin makes good use of the ii-V-I turn around between the phrases to be able to get back to tonic. He uses a change to the minor mode (C major to c minor) in the C section combined with third relationships in the harmony. This creates interest and variety that makes it special to the song, otherwise it would make this section seem unnecessary.

Form:

8-bar intro; no verse; refrain 72-bars; AABCA (C is 8 bars, everything else is 16 bars)

Lyrics:

The lyrics only rhyme for the second, third, and fourth set of four bars for each section. (e.g. 'speak,' 'seek,' 'cheek.')

There are numerous clever turns of phrases, such as: "seem to vanish like a gambler's lucky streak."

These lines always come back to, "when we're out together dancing cheek to cheek."

The B section enumerates the things the singer likes to do, but the lyric comes back to the lover being the thing he/she enjoys most.

The C section lyrics are a declaration of what the singer would like to do. "Dance with me, I want my arms about you."

There is a youthful exuberance in this piece that leaves the listener humming the song long after it is over.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 1, p. 80

Notes:

This song works well if you have an accomplished accompanist who can devise a tag ending. The last five bars can be augmented to, "when we're out together dancing, out together dancing, out together dancing cheek to cheek."

This change only works with a harmonic sequence that rises by step each time. Young singers will need a lot of collaboration time to make this piece work well. It can be performed in a variety of styles and tempi.

The song was written specifically for Fred Astaire. Alec Wilder wrote, “-every song written for Fred Astaire seems to bear his mark. Every writer, in my opinion, was vitalized by Astaire and wrote in a manner they had never quite written in before: he brought out in them something a little better than their best-a little more subtlety, flair, sophistication, wit, and style, qualities he himself possesses in generous measure. And Cheek To Cheek is a case in point.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Alex Wilder, *American Popular Song*, 1970-1973.

Composer: Irving Berlin

Lyricist: Irving Berlin

Song Title: “They Say It’s Wonderful”

Show Title: *Annie Get Your Gun*

Date: 1946

Key: F Major Range: C4 – D5 Tessitura: F4 – C5

Melody:

The beginning of the verse sounds similar to the verse for *Blue Skies*. It is declamatory and follows the pattern of speech. There is a nice lilt in the melodic line. It begins low, rises, and then leaps down. It is tinged with mild chromaticism.

Rhythm:

The song is in common time and marked slowly. The rhythm is simple, never using anything more complicated than eighth notes—and those are few.

Harmony:

The harmonic rhythm changes occur every two beats. Berlin uses numerous mm7 chords and a few ninth chords throughout. It is in the final bar of the piece that he uses the most complex chords: Gm9, Gb7#9(#11), F9.

Form:

2-bar intro; 2 verses (one Annie, one Frank) 32-bars AABA; refrain 32-bars AABA – (excluding repeat)

Lyrics:

The lyric matches the colloquial nature of *Annie Get Your Gun*. The couple is not ready to commit to each other, but it is implied and danced around throughout the song. There is a sense of impetuous playfulness in the lyric that matches the characters of the show.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 2, p. 336

Notes:

Kern was contracted to compose the score, but he died before even beginning it. (Duet).

This song will work well for young singers, particularly working on creating a sub-text and interpretation. From a technical standpoint, the song is not difficult, so the focus can be on musicality.

Lyrics:

There are several different sets of lyrics for the refrain because of the suggestive lyrics. "Let's Fall in Love" had to be added to the title to be able to get past the censors. Porter had a penchant for suggestive lyrics. Of course, he was not talking about actually falling in love. Each refrain is a litany of different animals who "do it."

Scores:

The Cole Porter Song Collection, vol. 1, p. 151

Notes:

This song can be sung by a young singer, if the singer has an excellent ear. Every phrase contains chromaticism and numerous half-steps. Although the song sounds fine as written, a skilled pianist may wish to embellish the harmony. Due to the suggestiveness of the lyrics one should consider the age and disposition of the student before assigning it to a student.

Composer: Cole Porter

Lyricist: Cole Porter

Song Title: “What is this Thing Called Love?”

Show Title: *Wake Up and Dream*

Date: 1929

Key: C Major Range: C4 – F5 Tessitura: G4 – D5

Melody:

The melody has a balance of stepwise motion and small skips. There are no large difficult intervals to negotiate, but Porter uses frequent chromaticism, which makes the melodic line moderately difficult. One needs a good ear to sing this song well.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately. The refrain is also marked slow blues feel. Porter uses the rhythmic figure eighth-quarter-eighth to create syncopation.



Example 14: Cole Porter, “What is This Thing Called Love?” Rhythmic motif used throughout the refrain.

Harmony:

Porter uses standard harmony, but uses half-diminished, fully diminished, and augmented sonorities to create different colors. There are not so many chromatic chords as to thicken the texture, but enough to provide interest.

Form:

4-bar intro; 16-bar verse; 32-bar refrain, AABA

Lyrics:

The singer in this song is surprised by love. He/she was not expecting to be bitten by the “love bug,” and thus asks a series of rhetorical questions about what is going on. Unfortunately, the feelings of love are not reciprocated, leaving this singer to feel alone.

Scores:

GAS, Jazz, p. 390; The Cole Porter Song Collection, vol. 1, p. 232

Notes:

The singer for this song needs to understand irony. Since there are numerous phrases containing chromaticism, a good ear and careful attention to detail are essential for a singer to be successful with this piece. It could be a good song for a young singer...but careful collaboration with an accompanist and teacher are necessary for success.

Composer: Cole Porter

Lyricist: Cole Porter

Song Title: “Love for Sale”

Show Title: The New Yorkers

Date: 1930

Key: Bb Major Range: Bb3 – F5 Tessitura: F4 – D5

Melody:

The melody has a seedy/blues feel. Porter uses a modal shift between D and Db throughout to highlight the fact that this song is about the taboo subject of prostitution. There are many phrases that begin with repeated notes before finishing with some version of the “love for sale” text. The song has a wide range, but there are not many large interval leaps.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and is marked moderately. The refrain is marked “with swinging rhythm and not fast.” Rhythmically, this song is not difficult. There are not rhythmic features that “make” this song.

Harmony:

Porter borrows from the parallel minor (Bb/bb) throughout the song. This gives the listener the idea that something is going on that should not be. People know prostitution happens, but don’t want to talk about it. The harmony of the song subtly insinuates this into the listener’s ear so it cannot be ignored.

Form:

4-bar intro; 20-bar verse; 4-16-bar sections with 8-bar tag; AABA tag

Lyrics:

The lyrics are not just suggestive, but border on being explicit. Phrases such as, “appetizing young love for sale,” “who would like to sample my supply,” and “who’s prepared to pay the price for a trip to paradise,” leave little doubt as to what is going on in this song.

Scores:

The Cole Porter Song Collection, vol. 1, p. 168

Notes:

This song is not for an inexperienced singer. It is a great cabaret style song for an older student/singer. The text is of paramount importance for this piece and its delivery must be spot on to be successful.

Composer: Cole Porter

Lyricist: Cole Porter

Song Title: “Easy to Love”

Show Title: *Born to Dance*

Date: 1936

Key: G Major Range: A3 – D5 Tessitura: D4 – B4

Melody:

The melody of the verse has a wide range and lots of chromaticism, but only one leap. The melody of the refrain has numerous leaps, including several ascending and descending octave leaps. Porter also uses several falling chromatic lines, which creates a sense of ease and light heartedness.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately. There are two salient rhythmic features within this piece. One is the use of the triplet, the other is the use of syncopation, which occurs in the second half of the phrase in the A sections.

Harmony:

The harmonic rhythm of this piece is faster than some of the others examined in this document. Porter uses some ninth chords and some diminished chords, but does not make use of extended jazz harmonies.

Form:

4-bar intro; 16-bar verse; refrain 43-bars, ABAB’ (verse not included in GAS, the Singers anthology)

Lyrics:

The lyrics are witty and light hearted, which fit the rhythmic flow of the piece. There are numerous rhymes such as “yearning for” and “burning for.” This help to keep the capricious mood of the piece. There are different lyrics to the second and third refrain that are included in the Cole Porter collection.

Scores:

GAS, the Singers, p. 81, Cole Porter Collection, vol. 1, p. 72.

Notes:

This piece can be performed in a variety of different styles and tempi, making it an excellent song choice for a young student. Pedagogical issues include working through the passaggio points and singing legato. Proper text accentuation and word stress are essential for this song as well.

Composer: Cole Porter

Lyricist: Cole Porter

Song Title: "I Concentrate on You"

Show Title: *Broadway Melody of 1940*

Date: 1939

Key: Eb Major Range: Bb3 – Eb5 Tessitura: Bb3 – C5

Melody:

The melody is primarily stepwise with a few skips. Porter uses chromaticism, usually in the second half of the phrase. During the B section the pattern changes and the phrase begins with a leap and then a falling chromatic line. The final return of the A section begins on the highest note of the piece, but is derived from the original A section. The piece ends with an eight-bar tag that is a two-stage sequence.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately slow. Porter uses a quarter note rest followed by three quarter notes to begin each phrase. The second half of each phrase uses a triplet.

Harmony:

Porter primarily uses triads and seventh chords in this song. There are several places where modal shifts and harmonies suggesting chromatic relationships. The harmony is its simplest at the climax of the piece when the A section returns.

Form:

8-bar intro; no verse; AABA'/A 32-bar with 8-bar tag ending.

Lyrics:

Porter uses internal and external rhyme to create smooth flow of the text to accommodate the melody. The singer enumerates the bad things in life that happen—and when they do, "I concentrate on you." The B section focuses on the all the wonderful things about the singer's love, their smile, eyes, and arms, that make them forget about all the bad things in life.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 2, p. 96

Notes:

The lyrics lend themselves well to working on a singer's acting skills. There are several repetitions of "I concentrate on you," which the singer will need to work out so they do not all sound the same. The use of chromaticism throughout may prove difficult for inexperienced singers.

Composer: Cole Porter

Lyricist: Cole Porter

Song Title: “Night and Day”

Show Title: *Gay Divorce* (also in movie)

Date: 1932 (stage) 1939 (movie)

Key: C Major Range: G3- C5 Tessitura: C4 – G4

Melody:

The verse is sixteen bars and Porter only uses three pitches. It is meant to be speech like—primarily to help with Fred Astaire’s limited range. The verse ends with the repeated note/word “you, you, you,” which elides into the refrain. The melody of the refrain is smooth and inviting. It is intimate and exuberant at the same time.

Rhythm:

The salient rhythmic feature of this piece is the use of the triplet. It gives the piece a lilting flow that makes the piece very smooth, even though there are numerous leaps throughout.

Harmony:

The harmonic rhythm of the piece is faster than in other Porter songs. The harmony at the beginning of the verse is more suggestive than actual chords voiced out. One can hear the suggested harmony in the overtones, but the notated score has octaves in both hands. This helps to highlight the speech like quality of the text.

Form:

4-bar intro; 16-bar verse; 32-bar AABA.

Lyrics:

The lyrics to this love ballad are purely sappy. The singer is professing his/her love. In the text for the verse the singer enumerates common, everyday things, which he/she only sees his/her love. The text of the refrain is repetitive, but again enumerates those everyday things that he/she reminds him/her of the love. By the end it is clear the singer will not be happy until, “you let me spend my life making love to you.”

Scores:

GAS, Jazz, p. 260; Cole Porter Song Collection, vol. 1, p. 181.

Notes:

It has a limited range because it was written for Fred Astaire. Even so, Astaire did not believe he was capable of singing the song well, and wanted it taken out of the show. Porter insisted the song remain in the show. It is also the only song from the original stage production that remained for the movie.¹⁰⁰ Nearly every popular singer from the thirties, forties, fifties, and beyond have recorded a version of Night and Day. It has also been recorded in a variety of styles from slow ballad to Latin, to samba. This makes the song versatile and an excellent choice for a young singer. It makes a great closer for a recital.

¹⁰⁰ Philip Furia and Michael Lasser, *America's Songs*, 103-104.

Composer: Cole Porter

Lyricist: Cole Porter

Song Title: “You’d Be So Nice to Come Home To”

Show Title: *Something to Shout About*

Date: 1943

Key: C Major Range: C4 – E5 Tessitura: E4 – D5

Melody:

The melody is primarily stepwise with small skips coming at the end of most phrases. The skips often coincide with the syncopation highlighting the ends of phrases. There is mild chromaticism throughout the refrain in the form of neighbor tones and passing tones. The end of the A’ section ends with a descending chromatic passage.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately slow, with feeling. Syncopation is a key feature for this piece. It can be performed at a variety of tempi making the piece versatile. The piece can be performed with the rhythms straight or swung.

Harmony:

Harmonically the tune is complex. The harmonic rhythm is fast, with chords changing on each eighth note of the measure. Porter uses numerous extended jazz harmonies throughout, but the end of the piece uses only the standard ii-V7-I.

Form:

4-bar intro; 16-bar verse. 32-bar refrain – A A’

Lyrics:

The verse for this piece is not a typical sappy love lyric. With lyrics like “you’re rarer than asparagus” it may be easy to think this song is silly and not worthy of study. While it’s true the verse is facile in its rhyme, the refrain offers something worthy of study. Porter, as he was often wont to do, enumerates the ways “you’d be so nice.” There are references to “by the fire,” “while the breeze on high sings a lullaby,” “under stars chilled by the winter,” and “under an August moon burning above.” He ends the lyric by stating, “you’d be like paradise to come home to and love.”

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 1, p. 408.

Notes:

This was the only song from the show to become a hit. Before being published, Porter had at least four other possible titles for this song. He wasn't satisfied with the lyrics and re-wrote them.¹⁰¹

Observation from *A Cole Porter Companion*. “‘You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To’ may call to mind ‘Easy to Love,’ since its complete first line is “You'd be so easy to love,” and in this song too the conditional ‘You'd be’ is a central device. And both songs end with the chromatic descent from the third scale degree through the flatted third scale degree to the second scale degree and then to the tonic. They have structural similarities as well that recur in other Porter songs.”¹⁰²

This piece works well with a sequenced tag ending and a skilled collaborator can help dress up this tune nicely. It is a good choice for a young singer. Young students may have some issues related to the upper passaggio. The rhythmic syncopation is the most difficult thing for a young singer. Good text expression is paramount.

¹⁰¹ Philip Furia and Michael Lasser, *America's Songs*, 190.

¹⁰² Don M. Randel, Matthew Shaftel and Susan Forscher Weiss, *A Cole Porter Companion* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 5226-5230, Kindle.

Composer: Cole Porter

Lyricist: Cole Porter

Song Title: “So In Love” (duet)

Show Title: *Kiss Me Kate*

Date: 1948

Key: Ab Major Range: C4 – Fb5 Tessitura: Eb4 – D5

Melody:

The melody has a wide range that contains mostly stepwise motion. Unlike some of Porter’s other melodies, this song requires a more “art-song” or opera approach in style. The long flowing lines require the singer to sing legato with more vibrant resonance than is required of some of the light hearted songs from this time period. This adds a level of sophistication to the piece that other Porter songs do not have.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately. There are no difficult rhythms for the performer. The gentle syncopation is relatively easy and seems natural, thus not interrupting the flow of the line.

Harmony:

The introduction to the song clearly begins in Ab major and transitions to the relative minor (f). The mode appears to be returning to Ab major at the end of the first phrase, but is halted by the dominant in f minor. Porter cleverly uses a short rhythmic riff to return to f minor. The second phrase ends in Ab major, which leads into the B section, also in Ab major. Porter uses only two extended (jazz) chords up to this point, one a C9, to return to f minor for the return of the A section. The tag ending is the most harmonically active section for this song. Porter does use diminished seventh chords and ends with the use of an Ab13 chord.

Form:

Form is unusually long (90 bars). 12-bar introduction. No verse. The song is originally setup as a duet, but is frequently performed as a solo. The form is AABA with a tag ending. Each section is sixteen bars. The tag ending is fourteen bars.

Lyrics:

The lyrics for this piece are in contrast to the long flowing lines of the melody. If read alone, the words seem to be the typical over-the-top sappy

love song. If one considers the lyric, the melody, and the context for the song, it is clear they heighten the tension between the two singers.

Scores:

GAS, the Composers, vol. 2, p. 294.

Notes:

The premise of *Kiss Me Kate* is a “show-within-a-show.” A divorced couple finds themselves reunited on stage as lovers. “So in Love” is a duet they must sing to one another. The feelings they actually have at the beginning of the song are anything but love, but by the end of the piece, they realize maybe they still do love one another. This is a perfect piece to use with a student to have them work on sub-text. To be effective, the body language used must be in direct conflict to what the text is communicating. This will be challenging for younger students, but can also be a worthwhile vehicle for experimentation.

Songs of George Gershwin

Composer: George Gershwin

Lyricist: Ira Gershwin

Song Title: “The Man I Love”

Show Title: Never published as part of a show

Date: 1927

Key: Eb Major Range: D4 – Eb5 Tessitura: G4 – Eb5

Melody:

There is a lot of chromaticism throughout. The verse is primarily scalar in nature. The interest here comes from the rhythm. The refrain uses recurrent upper-neighbor tones, but ends nearly every measure on a chromatic incomplete neighbor tone.

Rhythm:

The song is in common time and marked *andantino semplice*. Rhythmic motives occur throughout. The first six measures of the refrain's A section have the rhythmic motif of dotted-eighth rest—sixteenth note—dotted-eighth—sixteenth note followed by dotted-eighth—sixteenth note.



Example 15: George Gershwin, “The Man I Love.” Rhythmic motif used throughout the refrain.

The rhythm in the B section also uses the dotted-eighth—sixteenth note figure, but is complimented by quarter notes, providing a nice contrast to the disjunct and jagged rhythm of the A section.

Harmony:

For Gershwin, the harmonic rhythm is moderate. When the singer is not singing, the harmony comes on every beat. When the singer is singing, there is one, sometimes two chords per measure. Gershwin makes use of several half and fully diminished sonorities throughout. There is only one ninth chord in the piece.

Form:

20-bar verse (including intro); refrain AABA

Lyrics:

The slow tempo of the piece highlights the sad, sultry lyrics for this piece. The singer clearly has not found her man, but she has not given up hope. She knows she will find him someday and when she does, she will “do her best to make him stay.”

Scores:

GAS, Jazz, p. 242

Notes:

Originally “The Man I Love” was “tried out” in several shows—*Lady Be Good*, *Strike Up the Band*, and *Rosalie*—but it wasn’t right for any show. It became a hit despite not succeeding in a show. The refrain was originally written as a verse for another song.¹⁰³

A skilled pianist can use chord substitutions to create more variety in the accompaniment. Young singers may have difficulty connecting with the passionate subject matter for this song. Issues related to tessitura and the upper passaggio may prove challenging for a young singer.

¹⁰³ Donald Ewen, *George Gershwin: His Journey to Greatness* (New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1986), 92-93.

Composer: George Gershwin

Lyricist: Ira Gershwin

Song Title: “But Not for Me”

Show Title: *Girl Crazy* (later – *Crazy for You* – 1992)

Date: 1930

Key: Eb Major Range: Eb4 – F5 Tessitura: Eb4 – C5

Melody:

The melodic line in the verse is simple. Much of the line is stepwise. Even the small amount of chromaticism in the verse makes sense to the ear and is not difficult. The first eight bars of the refrain employ a simple motive that is stepwise up, down, up, down, down/repeat. The entire section repeats, but using the highest note of the piece (F5) in the final set of eight bars. This note coincides with the word “kiss,” making it seem natural to use a tenuto to lengthen it.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately. Most performers tend to take this song slower. Rhythmically this song is not difficult.

Harmony:

Harmonically this song is sophisticated in its use of jazz chords. The texture is thick because the harmonies change frequently. Numerous chords are spelled enharmonically, making them easier to read.

Form:

4-bar intro; 24-bar verse; refrain 32-bars – A A’

Lyrics:

The singer enumerates the happy things going on for everyone else, but punctuates each line with “but not for me.” This introspective text has an intoxicating feel to it. Then the singer compares his/her life to all the happy couples, knowing that it will never be for him/her.

Scores:

The Gershwin Song Collection, vol. 1, p. and GAS, Jazz, p. 68, from the great American songbook, p.14

Notes:

The introspectiveness of this piece can make it difficult for a young singer. Most young people do not possess enough life experience to truly understand the meaning of the text. An inexperienced singer will have to develop strategies for acting to be able to deliver the text in authentic way. The last A section will be the most difficult for a young singer because of the leap to F5 at the climax. The song ends matter-of-factly.

Composer: George Gershwin

Lyricist: Ira Gershwin

Song Title: "Who Cares?"

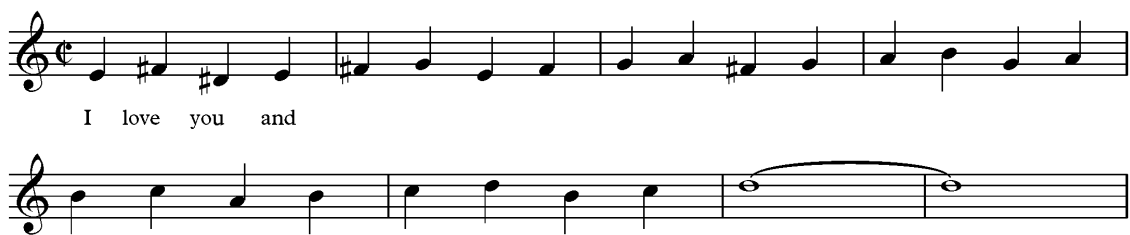
Show Title: *Of Thee I Sing*

Date: 1931

Key: C Major Range: C4 – E5 Tessitura: F4 – D5

Melody:

The melody of the verse is disjunct and is filled with chromaticism that suggests C minor. The melody of the verse begins with a descending scalar pattern, and then leaps back up to its original starting note before beginning the sequence again. Beginning at measure 13 of the verse, the melody contains step-skip-step-step pattern that rises from E4 to D5 (a minor seventh).



Example 16: George Gershwin, "Who Cares?" Melodic pattern used in the verse.

The refrain is also disjunct, but has less rhythmic motion than the verse. This makes it seem slower and more laid back. It is not the typical lyrical or beautiful melody.

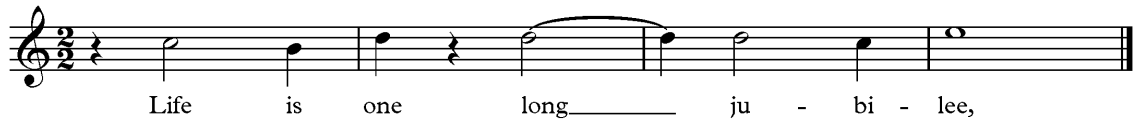
Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately. The second eight bars of the refrain begin with a quarter rest followed by a half note, then quarter note tied across the bar to another quarter note, creating a subtle syncopation.



Example 17a: George Gershwin, "Who Cares?" Measures 44-46. Syncopation.

In the fifth measure of the A' the rhythmic pattern changes, making it quarter note-quarter rest-half-note tied across the bar. This is just enough of a change to throw off a young singer.



Example 17b: George Gershwin, "Who Cares?" Measures, 56-59. Change in syncopation in A'

Harmony:

The harmony for this piece is dissonant. Instead of the melody occurring as the highest sounding part of the right hand, it is in the middle, with accompanying figures both above and below it. This creates a clash of a second throughout the entire refrain. Gershwin uses numerous major-major and half-diminished sonorities throughout. As the melody gets higher, more extended jazz harmonies (ninths, thirteenths, and augmented chords) are used.

Form:

8-bar intro; 28-bar verse; refrain – 2-16-bar phrases A A'

Lyrics:

The lyrics are not that of a typical love song. There is a declaration of love, but the singer is completely unconcerned with what anyone else thinks of the relationship.

Scores:

Gershwin Song Collection, vol. 2, p. 28

Notes:

The chromaticism in the song may make it difficult for an inexperienced singer. If the singer has a particularly good ear, it is a wonderful song for the student. The shifts between the staccato and legato sections will help a student work on phrasing issues.

Composer: George Gershwin

Lyricist: Ira Gershwin

Song Title: “You’ve Got What Gets Me”

Show Title: *Girl Crazy*

Date: 1932

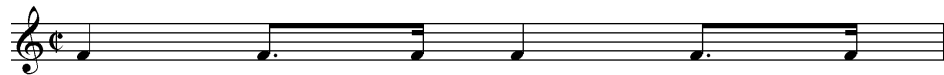
Key: F Major Range: C4 – E5 Tessitura: F4 – E5

Melody:

The verse contains five bar sub-phrases. The first three phrases are sequences with phrase one and three being identical. The first is disjunct, leaving the listener with the immediate impression that this love song is meant to be light hearted and not serious.

Rhythm:

The piece is in cut time and marked moderately. A salient feature of the rhythm for this piece is the dotted-eighth/sixteenth note pattern that occurs throughout the verse and the eighth-quarter-eighth pattern for the refrain.



Example 18a: George Gershwin, “You’ve Got What Gets Me.” Rhythmic motif in the verse.



Example 18b: George Gershwin, “You’ve Got What Gets Me.” Rhythmic motif for the refrain.

Harmony:

The harmonic rhythm of the piece is fast with chords happening two or three to a bar. Gershwin makes frequent use of major-major sonorities, as well as augmented-seventh chords, and diminished seventh chords. The use of fast changing harmonies creates a thick texture, which adds another dimension to the color of the piece.

Form:

4-bar intro; 20-bar verse (AA’A’’BB’); 32-bar refrain (ABABA – last B and A are only 4 bars each, almost like a codetta)

Lyrics:

The lyrics are like that of a child who cannot keep a secret. The text creates an energy that is equal to that of the melody and the harmony. The opening line of the verse is “I’ve got a secret that I can conceal no longer.” By the end of the verse the singer is jubilantly proclaiming his/her love.

Scores:

Gershwin Song Collection, vol. 2, p. 50

Notes:

This song is moderately difficult due to the disjunctness of the melody, chromaticism, and syncopation. An excellent pianist is required to perform this song in a pleasing way.

Composer: George Gershwin

Lyricist: Ira Gershwin

Song Title: “Nice Work If You Can Get It”

Show Title: *A Damsel in Distress*

Date: 1937

Key: G Major Range: B3 – E5 Tessitura: D4 – D5

Melody:

The refrain begins with four bars of stepwise motion with legato articulation and the second eight bars the use syncopation and is declamatory in nature. There are only a few skips, but the syncopation makes the line sound disjunct. The second set of eight bars use a descending chromatic triplet. This returns in the final A section. The B section is disjunct and maintains the syncopation throughout.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked moderately slow. There is significant syncopation throughout. Gershwin uses triplets with a descending chromatic pattern before the phrase “nice work if you can get it,” which creates a smoothness to the line. This creates a nice contrast to the syncopation. Each set of four bars in the B section begin with an eighth note rest, highlighting the syncopation.



Example 19: George Gershwin, “Nice Work If You Can Get It.” Juxtaposition of legato style and syncopation in the same musical phrase.

Harmony:

Gershwin uses numerous seventh and ninth chords throughout the refrain. There are relatively few triads. The harmonic rhythm is usually two chords per bar. In the last four bars of the song, there is a different chord on nearly every beat. Although there is some V-I motion, the common ii-V-I turn around is not used and there are many jazz substitution chords. You need a skilled pianist to play this piece. Forte describes the harmonic

progression as unusual, stating, “a chain of bass fifths consisting of five links...the chain breaks just at the end of the phrase.”¹⁰⁴

Form:

4-bar intro; 20-bar verse; AABA

Lyrics:

The lyrics for the song are romantic and sweet, but also have a light and exuberant quality to them. Ira writes some romantic gesture in the first four bars of the A section, which is followed by “nice work if you can get, and you can get it if you try.” The B section asks this listener to imagine “someone waitin’ at the cottage door” highlighting the fact the singer is head over heels in love. The final A section is extended by two bars. This allows for the lyric “and if you get it. Won’t you tell me how.” The surprise being the singer doesn’t actually have the romantic love that the listener assumes he does, thus creating a nice twist.

Scores:

The Gershwin Song Book, vol. 2, 178, GAS, Jazz, p. 257, there is no verse in GAS.

Notes:

Also used in *Crazy for You* (1992) and *My One and Only* (1983), this is a great acting song for a young student. Unlike many songs from this period that assume the singer has some life experience, this song has youthful exuberance throughout, making it ideal for a young singer. The singer has an idealized view of what love is like. Pedagogically, the singer has to learn to balance phrases that are legato for the first half and juxtaposed next to a syncopated disjunct sounding second half. When performed effectively, the listener is left with a picturesque view of love.

¹⁰⁴ Allen Forte, *The American Popular Ballad*, 172.

Composer: George Gershwin

Lyricist: Ira Gershwin

Song Title: “They All Laughed”

Show Title: *Shall We Dance* (film)

Date: 1937

Key: G Major Range: D4 – E5 Tessitura: E4 – D5

Melody:

The melody for the verse contains primarily stepwise motion with a few skips. The light syncopation for the verse helps to give it motion and character. The melody in the refrain is jerky and skips and leaps frequently. This adds to the light hearted character of the song. The B section is more lyrical. It begins with quarter notes and is declamatory in nature. The B section is also more stepwise in nature than the A sections.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and is marked moderately/gracefully. The song is more up tempo than one would expect from a ballad. Rhythm is a key feature for this piece. Gershwin uses an eighth rest before each sub-phrase of the A sections. This combined with the dotted eighth-sixteenth figure and the eighth-dotted quarter rhythmic figures to create a laid back tone to the piece. It lightens the feel and immediately the listener knows this song is not serious or emotional.

Harmony:

Gershwin uses extended jazz harmonies (jazz substitutions). In addition to the frequent use of the half-diminished harmonies, Gershwin uses ninth chords, thirteenth chords, and flat ninth chords. The harmonic rhythm is fast, sometimes using two chords per beat.

Form: 4-bar intro; 20-bar verse; refrain A A’B A’

Lyrics:

The lyrics are light hearted and playful. Ira makes use of famous people who were told they were foolish to follow their dreams. Like all of the examples enumerated in the song, the singer follows his/her heart and is rewarded with love. The verse is declamatory. The singer states the facts as he/she perceives them. At the end of the verse, the singer reminds the listener that history has been wrong before. The refrain is conversational in nature.

Scores: Gershwin Song Collection, vol. 2, p. 152

Notes:

While this song is not difficult for the singer, the pianist must be good. This is another of Gershwin's whimsical pieces. There is a playfulness that must come across in the delivery of the text. Since Ira uses the names of many well-known people throughout the song, the singer must pay particular attention to diction and enunciation.

Composer: George Gershwin

Lyricist: Ira Gershwin

Song Title: “Love is Here to Stay”

Show Title: *The Goldwyn Follies*

Date: 1937

Key: F Major Range: C4 – E5 Tessitura: E4 – D5

Melody:

The melody has a nice balance of conjunct and disjunct motion. The melodic idea of the first eight bars is mostly stepwise motion. The second set of eight bars leaps up to the song’s highest note and then gradually descends. The whole form repeats.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and is marked “with motion.” Gentle syncopation occurs throughout. It can be performed with or without a swing style, or in a combination of both.

Harmony:

The song uses standard jazz harmonies. There are generally two chords per measure. The way the chords are voiced in the published sheet music make it difficult for a novice pianist to play. A good pianist will use additional jazz substitutions to create more variety and interest in the harmony.

Form:

23-bar verse (including intro); refrain A A’ (each “A” is ab with each section having eight bars)

Lyrics:

The lyrics are very sweet—they sound like a typical love song about enduring love. The fact that Ira added them after George’s death make them take on an additional subtext. The relationship with his brother was special, and indeed is “here to stay.” The verse characterizes all the things going on that are not positive, but ends by stating emphatically “we’ve got something permanent, I mean in the way we care.” This transitions beautifully into the refrain. The text of the refrain is authentic about the love two people share for one another. The way the refrain begins is somewhat understated, but builds as the melodic line rises to the phrase “the radio and the telephone and the movies that we know may just be

passing fancies, and in time may go.” The final phrase ends with the poignant phrase, “but our love is here to stay.”

Scores:

GAS, Jazz, p. 216; Gershwin Song Collection, vol. 2, p. 204

Notes:

“Love is Here to Stay” is one of the last songs composed by Gershwin. Ira added the lyrics after George’s death and it was included in the *Goldwyn Follies*. In working with a young student the key to success for this song is the text. Allowing the student to work through many different possibilities for word accentuation will help the student to understand how the meaning of the text can be highlighted or even changed based on which word gets the most stress. This is a valuable skill for a young student. Most young students will have some issues with negotiating the upper passaggio.

Composer: George Gershwin

Lyricist: Ira Gershwin

Song Title: “They Can’t Take That Away from Me”

Show Title: *Shall We Dance* (film)

Date: 1937

Key: Eb Major Range: Bb3 – Eb5 Tessitura: Eb4 – C5

Melody:

Melodically this song is not difficult. The melody does have some syncopation and dotted rhythms, but these do not prove too challenging. Most of the melodic ideas in the A sections are stepwise with only a few skips. The B section should be performed more legato as the melody is primarily stepwise and has no syncopation. Although the score is not marked so, it is usually done in a “swing” style, where the eighth notes are not performed equally.

Rhythm:

The song is in cut time and marked “with movement” for the tempo. Gershwin uses triplets in the melody and this pitted against quarter notes in the bass, giving the feeling of a light syncopation without the song sounding jerky.

Harmony:

The song from Gershwin’s late period shows its maturity best through his use of harmony. Right from the first chord of the introduction (Eb13) it is apparent the harmony will be the most unique feature of this piece. Almost every measure uses two, three, or four different harmonies—often these are chromatic sonorities often referred to as “jazz substitutions.” The beginning and ending of most phrases center around traditional tonic/dominant relationships, but Gershwin fills the space between these anchors with harmonies that lie outside of the key of Eb major. He uses numerous major-major sonorities, diminished sonorities (on scale degrees other than seven), and augmented sonorities. What makes this song unique is the number of chromatically altered chords used in succession. This makes the harmonic texture thick.

Form:

22-bar verse (including intro); refrain AABA with tag; verse and chorus are elided. The B section is only eight bars.

Lyrics:

The verse is narrative, but with internal rhyme, which gives the verse a conversational feel. The refrain of this song plaintively enumerates the things the singer loves about his/her love. At the end of each four-bar sub-phrase the singer declares, “No, no, no they can’t take that away from me!” During the middle eight bars the song becomes more serious when the singer admits they may never meet again, but that he/she will always have the memory of...this is elided beautifully into the final A section that finishes out the song.

Scores:

GAS, Jazz, p. 372, Gershwin Song Collection, vol. 2, p. 158

Notes:

Originally sung by Fred Astaire. While melodically this song is not difficult, it requires an excellent pianist to play. Collaboration is important for this song. This song can work as a duet or as a solo. The singer(s) must work to tell the narrative in an authentic way. The repetitive nature of the phrases of the refrain require the singer to be creative with delivery of each line or the phrases will sound monotonous. The use of dynamics can help add variety while keeping the playful tone of the song intact.

Appendix

Source Materials (Scores)

The Cole Porter Collection, volume one: 1912-1936. Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.: Van Nuys, CA. ISBN-13: 978-0-7390-6230-2.

From the Great American Songbook, Minton Okun, editor. Cherry Lane Music Company: New York. ISBN: 1-57560-781-6.

The Gershwin Song Collection, volume two: 1918 – 1930. Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.: Van Nuys, CA. ISBN-13: 978-0-7390-5724-7.

The Gershwin Song Collection, volume two: 1931 – 1954. Alfred Publishing Co., Inc.: Van Nuys, CA. ISBN-13: 978-0-7390-5725-4.

The Great American Songbook: The Composers, vol. 1. Hal Leonard Corporation: Milwaukee, WI. ISBN-13: 978-1-4234-1954-9.

The Great American Songbook: The Composers, vol. 2. Hal Leonard Corporation: Milwaukee, WI. ISBN-13: 978-1-4234-6172-2.

The Great American Songbook: The Singers. Hal Leonard Corporation: Milwaukee, WI. ISBN-13: 978-1-4234-3094-0.

The Great American Songbook: Jazz. Hal Leonard Corporation: Milwaukee, WI. ISBN-13: 978-1-4768-7550-7.

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